SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 482. FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 26TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 482.] For the Week ending March 26th, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

THE PRETTY PEARL AND THE CRAFTY COMMISSIONER

Told at Soong-Kong on the Banks of the Grand Canal, on the 6th day of the month called Mow.

IN the cool of a lovely evening in the middle of summer, Mr. and Mrs. Chun were sitting in the veranda of their charming villa in Se-chewen, enjoying the breeze which came off the river, and discussing the prospects of the lady Chao.

Chao, who by reason of her exquisite complexion and surpassing beauty had been named the Pearl, was the one fair daughter of the house of Chun, and the marriage agents had on their books quite a number of "eligibles" who had been casting "sheep's-eyes" in that direction; for in loveliness of form and purity of feature the lady Chao, it was reported, could give points even to the famous beauty Kin-leen.

Mr. Chun laid down the letter from the agent who represented Moo Kat, the eldest son of the chief Salt Commissioner, and remarked to his wife that the Salt Commissioner's son was "a very estimable young man."

"Hai-yah! Mr. Chun," said the lady. "And what, pray, do you know about arranging these affairs? A man who meddles in woman's matters always reminds me of the owl that tried to sing like a nightingale, but only succeeded in looking like a fool. While your mouth is filled with the praises of Moo Kat, you know so little of the Book of Rites yourself as not to be aware that it is the mother's province to arrange the marriage of her daughters."

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"Well, of course, my dear," said Chun, feeling somewhat abashed under the sharp attack of his wife, "if you have anyone in your eye ——"

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Chun," replied the lady smiling sarcastically. "But were I in your place, sir, I would yield gracefully. Moo Kat, indeed! If you were still as I found you, toiling at the desk or drudging in the warehouse—Moo Kat, who belongs, I allow, to the official class, might do well enough. But not to-day, thank you! We've cut the shop, sir; and set up our quarters in the delightful village of Everlasting Felicity, in a house dedicated to the Goddess of Connubial Happiness; and, I don't care an orange-pip, Mr. Chun, for all the Moo Kats between this and the great wall.

"It was a blessed day for you, my dear," the lady ran on, "when I was weak enough to accept your contemptible presents and allow the red cords to bind my 'lily feet' to your pair of pedal deformities. I should like my daughter to do better than her mother."

Chun, who had the mildest disposition in the world, merely rubbed his palms together and murmured: "I thank Heaven and the Three Pure Ones* continually for having given me such a woman."

His wife gave a scornful little laugh, and sniffed at the white roses which crept about the veranda.

"I'm very pleased, Chun," said she, "that you have sense enough to acknowledge that this is my affair—not yours. Now listen to me"—the poor man had been doing very little else but listen all the years of his wedded life—"here have you been going into the town to look at the papers every day for a week; and every day you've come back to me with the same silly tale, 'There's nothing in the papers to-day, wife.' Of course, I never did believe that you went to read the papers, and now I'm sure of it. But if there's one thing I hate it's domestic scenes. I do like peace at home; and to enjoy that, a wife soon learns that if her eyes and ears may be kept open, her mouth must be

* The Chinese Trinity.

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He hummed in the Prefect's ear.

kept shut. Now, sir, after this, don't tell me any more that you're going into town to 'look at the papers.' Oh! you husbands," she exclaimed, shaking her head at the long-suffering Chun, "you're all matrimonial frauds."

Poor old Chun stole a look at his wife which intimated plainly that she had travelled very far away from him.

"Then you really *haven't* heard?" screamed the lady, coming down on the unfortunate man with the suddenness of a typhoon in the Yellow Sea. "Has no man then, so much as mentioned the greatest piece of news which has been told in these parts since the days before the Flood! What, in the name of Confucius, I wonder, do you men find to talk about? Nothing of any consequence, that's certain. We poor women could give you a long start and a good beating. Why, the news only arrived at mid-day, by special express messenger from Peking, and Mrs. Weng was here with it an hour later. Ha! ha! Chun."

Now the village of Everlasting Felicity, in which the establishment dedicated to connubial happiness was situated, lay so far out of the world that the latest intelligence of the doings at the capital took four months and twenty days to reach there by the ordinary channels. Small wonder, then, that Chun should meekly attempt to draw his wife's attention to this not unimportant fact.

But the lady, beating her ivory-mounted fan against the enamelled porcelain table, cried:

"Listen, sir, listen! Pray am I not to be allowed a word? You know very well you're only trying to palm off a paltry pretence to excuse your unpardonable conduct. Oh! you're a clever man, Chun, but I'm too cute to be caught by limed twigs. Now, then, not another word, please, till I've done.

"An Imperial courier has arrived to-day with a proclamation that the Emperor Yang Te has commissioned his minister Ma-o to select from the marriageable maidens in the Empire of Han, ninety-five of the most beautiful girls he can discover, and send them up to Peking for his son Lo Yang to choose wives from.

"Now where, I should like to know, is he going to find a more ravishing creature than my Pearl? I say, tell me where, Mr. Chun. You cannot? Then you might have the grace to say so. The girl is matchless; in truth, she is more like a child of the gods than a daughter of men. Oh, you needn't pocket the compliment, Chun! Yes, Pearl is a stork among poultry. Her beauty eclipses that of the moon, and is enough to make the flowers turn green with envy.

"The minister is to arrive to-morrow, and the girls are to be at the *yamun* next day precisely at ten o'clock. The Prefect will be in attendance to see all's fair and no favour. Ninety-five are to be sent up; but only half-a-dozen will be chosen, and my Pearl's going to come out at the top. Now I must be off to see about the things she's to wear, and I shall expect you to do a father's part by the girl, Chun, and give her a handsome trousseau."

* * * * *

On the day of the great choosing, the scene in the large hall of the Prefect's *yamun* defies all description. Only the great poet of the Sung dynasty could do justice to it.

The province of the Four Streams is famous for the beauty of its women; and on this occasion the loveliest forms and the fairest faces were all in one basket.

"You miserable creature," screamed his wife.

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The police never had such a day's work. Not till the Prefect, assuming his sternest official manners, had called for a one inch bamboo and administered summary justice on the principal offenders, was sufficient silence obtained to start business.

Such a galaxy of beauty, such a battery of dark almond eyes, such an array of exquisite features lit up with pleasure and expectancy, was more than mortal man could endure with equanimity.

And, before the Imperial Commission, as elsewhere, Pearl stood like a phœnix among crows, resplendent as the moon on the fourteenth night, and fascinating as a fairy. While others owed no small debt to the "make-up" box and the costumier, Pearl had discarded the lavish adornments and richly embroidered robes provided by her mother, and trusted solely to a simple country gown and her own natural beauty.

"May the graves of my ancestors be dishonoured," exclaimed Commissioner Ma-o, "if the lady Chao is not a Pearl of price—a jewel meet for the Imperial Crown." And, under pretext of consultation, he hummed in the Prefect's private ear:

"Of all the girls where'er I've been,
Of all the girls my eyes have seen,
This pretty Pearl of winsome mien
Will make Lo Yang the prettiest Queen."

While the Prefect, responsive to the influence of so many pairs of feminine eyes bent upon him in sweet simplicity, relaxed so far as to tap the Commissioner playfully on the near arm with his sandal-wood fan.

It was a delicate business, that of choosing the maidens fit to be "basket and broom"* to Prince Yang; but Ma-o was a connoisseur in such matters and at last his list was filled. After the damsels, the fathers.

Chief Commissioner Ma-o was troubled with an itching palm. Nothing served to allay the irritation but a liberal application of the metal called silver. It was the custom for the fathers of the "chosen" to provide the "remedy" when Ma-o had named the right amount.

In the usual course, he called upon Mr. Chun to arrange for Pearl's portrait to be painted by the artist attached to the Imperial Commission; and incidentally mentioned that the fee for giving Pearl a "good place" was five thousand *taels* of silver.†

"Do you want to ruin me!" exclaimed Chun.

"I'm very sorry if you haven't such a paltry sum by you," said Ma-o, "but really I haven't time to discuss the matter. So many girls to look after."

Chun offered four thousand.

"I've no taste for bargaining," answered Ma-o. "You can send it on. But I'm leaving as soon as the portraits are completed; so you'll excuse me reminding you that 'a stitch in time saves the garment.'"

That there was some occult threat conveyed by this hint, Chun quite understood; and while he was bemoaning the fate of fathers who only reared daughters for other men's sons to run off with, in tripped Mrs. Chun, eager to learn how "it had gone off."

"You miserable creature," screamed his wife before Chun had half finished. "I see what it is. *My* daughter against *your* money! And do you suppose that I shall allow the girl's chance to be ruined by your stinginess? I should be ashamed to squabble over a paltry thousand *taels*. What if he has asked you twice as much as he demanded from Koo Pee—it's a compliment, you poor, blind mole, that cannot see it. Isn't Pearl worth it? The Commissioner, it seems, has a far better idea of the girl's value than you have, though you do claim to be her father. There! I do not want to make a scene! I never knew a man who understood a woman yet! For goodness sake, Chun let's have no scandal. Send him the money with your apologies, and let there be no more words about it."

Commissioner Ma-o was handed over to the public executioner.

So Ma-o got his five thousand *taels*, and, having directed the damsels to appear at the Emperor's Palace in the Purple City* on a day named, packed up his portraits and departed. But the Commissioner had pigs of his own to bring to market—nieces he called them; and as blood is thicker than water, their names appeared high up in the list of the ninety-five.

Spring Day and Summer Cloud were not bad-looking girls; and their uncle had taken a few pardonable liberties with their official portraits. But not a girl of them all stood the ghost of a chance alongside Pearl, the lady Chao.

No sooner thought, no sooner done. Out comes Pearl's portrait, off goes Ma-o to a private artist—result, a copy, in which Pearl the inimitable appeared as a passably good-looking lot, but nothing to sing over. And, behold when the Emperor inspected the miniatures, bang went the Imperial pencil through the lady Chao's name; and poor Pearl was bundled off with the "rank and file," who were sent to console themselves in the "Cold Wing" of the Purple Palace.

Time will not permit of us returning to the village of Everlasting Felicity to see how it fared with Mr.

* Chinese synonym for wife. † £1,500.

* The innermost of the four cities of Peking.

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and Mrs. Chun. But exactly twelve months after the marriage of Lo Yang and Spring Day, the Emperor happened to be strolling in his grounds one quiet evening when he was startled by the sound of singing. The voice was of such entrancing sweetness that involuntarily he raised his eyes to Heaven, expecting to see a Celestial vision. Presently, however, he discovered that the melodious strains came from a window in that part of the building known vulgarly as the "Cold Wing." It was Pearl singing to her lute. Afraid to move for fear of losing a single note, the Emperor remained rooted to the spot.

The words, the air, the voice made a deep impression upon his Majesty's mind. For several minutes after the singing ceased he kept his place, only withdrawing when the syren sounds no longer lingered in his ear.

To summon the singer to his presence was the first command he issued, and scarcely had the Gracious One composed his features and settled himself on his cushions, when Pearl, in all the piquancy of *déshabille*, appeared before him. The sight of her ravishing beauty filled him with such utter astonishment that for some time he was unable to do aught but stare—stricken dumb by a loveliness surpassing all that the mind of man could picture or conceive.

You may guess it did not take long after this to pull the crooked straight and put the saddle on the right horse.

Spring Day, as a punishment for the crime of being niece to a wicked old uncle, was packed off to the "Cold Wing," while Commissioner Ma-o was handed over to the public executioner, with instructions to start him at once on a visit to the Yellow Springs by the longest of the usual official routes. But soon all else was forgotten in the preparations that were being made for the marriage of Lo Yang with Pearl, the lady Chao.

The wedding was celebrated at the next full moon, which the astrologers declared to be one of the most fortunate in the whole year for marriages. And amid the merry strains of the Dragon and the Phœnix from the massed bands of the Peking garrison, and the acclaiming shouts of "may a hundred sons, and thousand grandsons be your portion" from the seething million, Pearl was lifted over the pan of charcoal at the threshold, and entered the Purple Palace as the beauteous bride of Lo Yang, the Emperor Yang Te's eldest son.

H. Hunter.

Old Karl's Secret.

A delightful September afternoon found me, after more than a year's wandering through Europe, seated upon the low, squatty porch of one of the little inns near Czegled, upon the road towards Buda-Pesth. I was smoking one of those monstrous meerschaum pipes, which the Germans love so well. It was a marvel of workmanship, the design of the bowl being a Turk's head.

I frequently took it from my mouth to rub the rich mahogany-coloured stem, or to examine the unique carving, for I doted upon that pipe. As I sat thus engaged, I noticed upon the steps of the porch an old man, apparently of the peasant class, whom I had observed about the inn on the day previous. He, too, seemed to be admiring the pipe intensely, for he eyed it as though he had never seen one before.

"I wonder what he thinks of it," thought I.

That was speedily disclosed, for no sooner had I caught the old fellow's eyes than he arose, and approaching, said respectfully, in good English:

"That is a very fine pipe you have there."

I was a bit surprised to be addressed in my own language by one of such humble appearance.

"Oh," I replied, "do you speak English? Come over here and talk with me, then. Yes; that's a beauty; I picked it up in Constantinople last year. Ever seen one like it?"

A smile spread over the face of the Hungarian.

"No, sir; never. It must have cost much money."

"More than I ought to have paid, perhaps; but I am fond of curios, and make it a point to get some wherever I travel."

"Yes?" somewhat eagerly replied the Hungarian; "and have you a large collection?"

"My private collection is said to be one of the finest in my native land. Where did you learn to speak English? You pronounce it remarkably well."

"My father taught me. He was bred at Prague," was the simple reply. "How come you to be here? Seek you here for specimens?"

"Yes, partly. I am on the way to procure some memento from the famous battlefields of Napoleon—Austerlitz and Wagram, you know."

A dark shade passed over the old man's face. It was a strong, stern countenance, very dark, but beaming with intelligence. At the mention of Napoleon's name, he frowned gloomily.

"Tyrant! Devil!" he muttered in German. "His army plundered my father's estate to the last spear of grass. His soldiery burnt our home. The estate itself was confiscated by old Francis, upon some false charges of treason, brought by General Mack, and my aged father became a wanderer upon the earth, and died in a shepherd's hut."

I could perceive the features of the peasant working strongly as he strove to master the powerful passions of grief and vengeance which surged mightily through his soul. Then, brightening once more, he exclaimed:

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"Mementoes from Austeriltz and Wagram? Why should you wish to be reminded of German misfortune, or Russian poltroonery, or French bloodthirstiness? There are better things for you here if you are able to obtain them."

"How 'able'? Will not money buy them?" I demanded.

"No, no; money buys not all things. Are you from London?"

"Yes," I replied.

A fresh gleam brightened the old peasant's face.

My curiosity was pricked. I took my pipe from my mouth and stared hard at the Hungarian. There was a suggestiveness about his conversation that was puzzling, but his countenance thus far betrayed nothing. I was, however, as much amused as curious.

"Tell me what there is here which I cannot get for money?" I said.

The evident anxiety and eagerness of the old peasant became intense.

"No, no," he replied. "I cannot tell you what there is, nor the price which is demanded, until I know more of you. Who are you, and what is your business in Austria?"

I began to be aroused. For answer to his question I gave him my name and address, adding: "I am only a sightseer on the Continent." I had in my pocket, with my passport, a letter from Francis, nephew of the Emperor Ferdinand, to some savants of Vienna. I had become acquainted with him some several weeks previous, and he had good-naturedly given it upon his own suggestion, for we had some tastes in common. These I handed to the queer old fellow, more in a spirit of fun than anything else, and quietly leant back to watch the effect. His face shone with genuine pleasure when he read them.

"Yes, yes; you are fortunate to know such men as Francis and Herr Loestein and Professor Rahl. I believe, too, that I am fortunate to meet you. I believe that you are the man for whom I have been waiting these many years."

Plainly, thought I, here is a queer old character, who probably has some heirloom of which he wishes to dispose at a good price. I said, half banteringly:

"Why have you waited for anyone? Can you have anything to sell? Come, perhaps we can transact a little business together."

The peasant seemed to shrink timidly within himself. At length he replied: "Walk with me down the road to yonder trees. What I say to you must not be overheard, even by walls, for they have both eyes and ears."

Surely it could do no harm to humour the old fellow. I rose, and we walked rapidly to the point indicated, and seated ourselves beneath the shade of a fine oak.

"Now, then," said I, "out with it."

The Hungarian burst forth impetuously:

"Sir, listen. I have a secret to sell which will make you a richer man than you have ever dared to dream, and me both rich and happy once more. I have something to dispose of, but it lies buried in the earth, and shall lie there for ever unless you, with your nationality, your money, and your influence, and I with my knowledge, unite to drag it to the light. But even you cannot do this unless you will swear a solemn oath that, upon my revealing to you the nature of this secret, you will deal faithfully with me."

"Whew!" I whistled through puckered lips. "A sort of buried treasure fiend, I take it. Wonder who and what he is?" Aloud to the Hungarian, whose dark old eyes were flashing with excitement, I said: "What is your name and occupation, and where do you live?"

"I am but a humble shepherd now. My flock is upon the Carpathians. My son tends it while I am absent. My name is only Karl, for it is not safe to tell you my surname. Our family was years ago exiled, and I may only live here in my native land in peril of my life. More than this you shall not know until we have agreed further."

The hurried, broken manner in which these sentences were uttered made an additional impression upon me.

"What kind of an oath do you want me to take?" I asked.

"Go with me to the Prothonotary in Czegled. He will draw the paper."

"Oh, I see! You want my bond, do you? Now look here, you should know by this time that I am a man of honour. I do now solemnly promise that I will not reveal the secret to anyone, if, upon learning its nature, we cannot agree further. If that is not sufficient"—here I refilled the meerschaum—"say not another word."

Great beads of perspiration started to his face. His eyes rolled and flashed, and his bosom heaved almost convulsively. He gasped forth at length:

"Sir, as you will have it, I must trust to you, or perhaps never again have an opportunity. I am already an old man. I must," sinking his voice to a whisper, and drawing so near me that his breath was hot upon my face. "On the little plot of ground that I call home, at the foot of the Carpathians, I have found a tomb, filled with untold wealth."

"Why don't you go and get it, then?" I demanded, still half amused, and adding to myself, "I made a guess that time."

"Why? Ah?" he exclaimed bitterly, "do not fancy that you are now in free England. Go and get it—for whom? Myself? No! but for the coffers of my Emperor."

A light suddenly dawned upon me. "I see, if you dig it up Ferdinand will seize it as treasure trove; while if I should smuggle it out of the country we alone get the benefit."

The peasant flung his arms about my neck, and fairly hugged me as he cried: "True, true! And more, the treasure I have found is not in coin alone, but"—here he thrust his hand into his bosom—"jewels and plate." He withdrew his hand, and placed a small sheepskin bag in mine. "There is the proof that I have spoken no lie, and thus I show you why it is that while really rich beyond computation, I must yet remain poor and humble—as now."

I opened the bag, and to my amazement it contained a number of strangely cut gems—rubies and diamonds and emeralds—of purest lustre. It was now my turn to become excited.

"Why, where in the name of ——" I began.

"Hold! Would you have still other proof? Here, then—you are a collector of curiosities—what make you of this?"

He drew from his bosom another packet, carefully depositing it on my lap. With hands all trembling with nervous excitement I untied the strings and drew forth a small crown or coronet of pure gold. What the peasant said during the next five minutes I never knew, although I heard his voice in animated talk. I only gazed in mute astonishment at the slim golden circlet in my hands. The metal was cleanly polished, showing a

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workmanship which was unmistakably of great age. Carefully turning it over and over I discovered some cabalistic figures or letters engraved on its front. Held so that the light would the better fall upon them, I made out the pregnant initials, S.P.Q.R. (Senate and people of Rome—*Senatus, populus que Romanus.*)

Had one of the old emperors of the Eternal City suddenly arisen from the dust and confronted me I could hardly have been more agitated than upon beholding so startling a memento of Imperial Rome. It flashed across me that the Hungarian was possibly telling me the exact truth. He might have stumbled upon the ancient burial place of some colonial nobleman or governor, who, during his lifetime, had been voted the golden crown by the Senate and people of Rome; or, possibly, it might be a deposit of the plunder of some outlaw, who had died with his secret untold. I could thus account for the presence of a considerable treasure in the tomb, and could also readily see why the old peasant had not been able to profit by his discovery.

Had one in his circumstances offered any of the old jewels or precious metals for sale, inquiry would at once have been set on foot as to where he had obtained them, and the old fellow would have been forced to disclose the hoard for the benefit of His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, and perhaps suffer the extreme penalty of concealing treasure trove from the monarch —death. Already those internecine disturbances, ending in Ferdinand's abdication, were beginning to make head, and the Austrian treasury, never plethoric, would have welcomed any addition however small.

My visit to the plains of Austerlitz was, for the time, forgotten, and all my energies were concentrated upon concluding a treaty with the peasant, and perfecting a plan whereby the treasure might be got safely out of Austria. As Karl had said, he was getting old, and now, if ever, was the time to realise the hoard. He had no friends in whom he could confide, and must depend upon a stranger, like myself, and take chances upon being fairly dealt with.

The country was at this time filled with police spies and Government agents of all kinds. How to elude these was a problem which bothered me considerably. I solved it, however, with the aid of an influential resident at Vienna, who, after much difficulty, procured me a dispensation from the Government to transport my trunks and baggage through and out of the empire without police inspection. This was done upon my representation that they contained nothing but curiosities of no particular value to anyone but myself—which was true enough at that time—and that they were liable to irreparable injury or destruction from an overhauling by careless hands. Armed with this document, given under the seal of the Secretary of State, I knew that I need fear no meddling with my baggage. The next thing to be done was to get the treasure.

Supplied with a few necessary tools, a few days later found us in the old peasant's hut, in a deep ravine in the blue Carpathians. The situation of the hut was one of absolute and utter isolation; not even a shepherd kindled fire within four miles. The hut was a one-room affair—as humble a place of abode as I ever entered. The son was absent with the flocks when we arrived. I had, fortunately, brought with me a supply of provisions, which added materially to the scanty larder of the shepherd.

It was after nightfall when we reached the hut, but so eager was I to be at the buried treasure that I could scarcely restrain myself from compelling old Karl to show me the spot at once. When morning came, Karl said that the work must be done in the darkness, so I was obliged to curb my impatience once more.

"Does your son know of the treasure?" I asked.

"He knows nothing of its value nor situation, although he is aware of its existence. The poor lad is——" Here he choked, and ended by tapping his forehead. "'Twas the fever did it," he added a moment later, and tears trickled plentifully down the brown cheeks. "He went to Wagram, where I thought he might get better employment. When I next saw my son some months later, his intellect was darkened."

By eight o'clock we were ready to set forth. The peasant now was feverishly anxious to bring the gold to light. The meal over, we sailed forth equipped with lanterns and a spade and pick. An eighth of a mile down the ravine was the sheepfold, and towards this old Karl silently took his way, I following. This fold was a large pen, with a covered shelter at one end about five feet high. Passing through the bars, we entered the pen, and then lighted our lanterns. I was on tip-toe with suppressed excitement. As the light streamed out, I noticed in one corner a heap of rubbish. Diving into this with both hands, the peasant soon laid the ground bare, and then exclaimed: "Come! Our work is here!"

I needed no second bidding, but immediately set to work with the pick, the shepherd throwing the dirt behind us. Soon a large round boulder was exposed to view.

"Behind that rock," said he, "is the cave. We may easily roll it away, for I put it there."

In an hour the whole work of excavation was done, and the mouth of a deep cavern in the hillside was opened. I dared not enter it at once for fear of poisonous air; but old Karl, who now seemed half crazed with excitement, crawled in. In a moment he crept back, nearly overcome with asphyxia. Plainly, the air must be purified before we could proceed. While the shepherd was recovering, I went to the hut and returned at once with a large bag of powder. Placing this as far into the cave as I dared go, I laid a trail to the entrance and lighted it. Immediately there was a dull flash, followed by a blinding cloud of smoke gushing from the opening. As soon as this had cleared I took my lantern and again crawled into the cave. The explosion of the powder had driven out the foul air, and I could breathe easily.

The cave was deep, but not large, and proceeding to the far end, I discovered a shelf of stone, upon which lay a huge metal coffin. Clambering upon the ledge, I carefully examined the casket, to discover, if possible, something of its age. It was apparently very old, and far too heavy for me to lift. I struck a few blows upon it with the pick, and stooped to notice the effect. It was startling and unlooked for. A dull, yellow gleam at the point of impact was all, but quite enough to convince me that the coffin before me was doubtless of pure gold.

Straightening up in astonishment, my attention was attracted to a large copper plate, fastened into the wall of the cavern just above the coffin. It was green with verdigris. Brushing this away as well as I was able, I could perceive an inscription which had evidently been in Latin. After many minutes' study I made out a few of the letters, still decipherable, the remainder were hopelessly defaced by the chemical action of the moisture and gases in the cave, but there, still clear cut and bold, were the two words:

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"ATTIIA sum . . . . ."

I knew that I stood in the presence of the mortal remains of Attiia, the Hun, Destroyer of Nations and Plunderer of the Roman Empire.

The truth, as it flashed across my brain, was overwhelming; and I turned and ran to the entrance of the cavern, overpowered at the tremendous discovery I had made. Old Karl was just entering. I caught him by the collar, and hugged him in a frenzy.

"Karl! Karl!" I cried, "within this vault lie the spoils of the mightiest city the world has ever seen! Beyond doubt, we are in the presence of untold millions of wealth, plundered from Rome and her provinces by barbarian hordes, and buried with Attiia the Hun."

I told him of the inscription on the copper plate, and together we returned and examined it. My companion was unacquainted with Latin, which had been much affected by the conquering Huns; but he could clearly read the name Attiia staring at us from the wall of the tomb. It was too real to seem real. So soon as our excitement had somewhat abated, I inquired where we must look for the treasure.

"You are standing in it," he replied.

This proved to be true. The floor of the cavern was of rock; but it was covered with silver and gold in every form of workmanship, to a depth of two feet.

We were overcome with excitement. At once returning to the hut, we brought to the cavern my three great trunks, now empty, and several heavy packing cases, and filled them with this lost wealth of old Rome and her colonies, and then we had made no perceptible diminution of the vast hoard. There were doubtless one hundred million pounds sterling at our command, and we laboured until long after daylight, picking and choosing the heaviest pieces of metal and choicest gems.

It was far into the day when we returned to the air, and replaced the stone before the mouth of the cavern. I seemed to have lived ten years in that single night within the bowels of the mountain. The old shepherd, on the contrary, had apparently renewed his youth by twice that time. He refused to leave the fold, when I declared myself utterly exhausted with hunger and fatigue, but remained to guard the spot, while I departed to get food and to sleep. Hastily devouring a half-eaten loaf and some dried meat, I threw myself on the heap of skins in the corner, and was almost instantly asleep.

It was again night when I awoke. The old shepherd was still absent, so I filled a bag with some food, and at once bent my steps towards the cavern. Karl was there, and told me that he had neither eaten nor slept during my absence. He snatched the food I had brought, and ate ravenously, and then we re-entered the cave.

After many hours' discussion, I persuaded the old peasant to consent to our leaving with what we had secured, showing him that at some time in the near future he could buy his peace with the Government, return to Austria, and repurchase his family estate. That then it would be far easier for us to get the remainder of the treasure and dispose of it. In the meantime the cavern could be concealed as it had before been. Karl finally agreed to this plan, and after removing every vestige of our labour from the outside, we returned to the hut.

I intended to go the next morning and buy an ox team and cart to carry away the priceless boxes and trunks, and by early dawn I was on the road. Two days passed before I found what I sought. Being unfamilar with ox driving, I employed a peasant to take the team to old Karl's hut. I was fearfully eager to get back to him, and hurried on the driver at the team's best pace; but on the afternoon of the third day, while only about two miles from the cave, we stopped a few minutes to rest upon a low summit on the opposite side of the valley.

The previous ten days had been so crowded with startling events that now I began to feel the strain. My accidental meeting with the shepherd, and his strange story; the enormous wealth at my command; the amazing discovery of the identity of the tomb, which would make mine one of the famous names of the nineteenth century; and, lastly, the responsibility resting upon me of taking the treasure safely out of Austria to a market.

A strange quivering ran through the ground. For an instant I fancied that my highly-wrought nerves were playing me tricks, then another long-continued tremor, and my ears were deafened by a mighty crash, as though the world were bursting asunder. I sprang up and looked across the valley where the hut lay, but could now discern it not. The giant hill, which had stood sentinel for fourteen centuries over the most magnificent treasure ever accumulated by human hands, had split in two, and was even then falling into the ravine, a frightful spectacle.

A second of suspense, and with an awful roar it struck a wild chaos of earth and rock, and a vast cloud of dust arose and curtained the catastrophe. The shock threw me, half stunned, to the ground. In a moment I was on my feet again, though all the hills trembled and rocked with the vibration. I shrieked in fear and despair, for it seemed as though the earth had thrown off her adhesion to the solar system, and were rushing to destruction in the voids of space; but as minutes passed, the blinding dust cloud which overhung the ravine cleared, revealing the true extent of the cataclysm. Alas! for all my hopes! A million tons of granite rock were heaped upon the spot where old Karl —rest his soul—had built his cot and sheepfold.

The great strain under which I had been labouring and the shock of the appalling disaster were too much to be borne by human nerves. I swooned away, and for many hours lay as one in the arms of Death.

There was no mystery about the great upheaval. In the half of the hill yet standing I could see what had been a great hollow basin, evidently of volcanic origin, showing traces of the recent presence of water. Almost straight up from this, through what had been the centre of the mountain, was a channel, terminating at the lake bed on the summit. The water from the lake had doubtless been centuries in percolating through to the basin beneath. Once this communication was established, however, the channel must have rapidly enlarged. It looked to be four feet in diameter. The weight of the water in this tall column and in the rising lake, acting with growing and resistless power upon the accumulated water in the lower chamber, had burst asunder the mountain as surely as ever was Herculean labour performed by hydrostatic pressure.

I made no effort to locate the possible whereabouts of the hut and sheepfold—that had been a hopeless task for an army. Never again would the eye of man behold the lost treasure of plundered Rome. And old Karl, with his poor, soul-darkened son, should rest through all eternity amidst the mass of treasure we had so nearly won, with the broken mountain for his headstone, and the heart of another for his tomb, side by side with the dust of Attiia the Hun.

De Leon Hall.

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A DETERMINED LOVER.

I THINK it may be stated, without fear of successful contradiction, that at no period of a man's existence does Cupid strike so deeply and cause so much sleeplessness as at the age of one score or thereabouts.

I always feel sorry for a chap in this sort of pickle, and I felt particularly sorry for poor Shorty Fleming. I knew I ought to discourage him, but he was such a good little fellow, and so much in earnest, that I would have defied a far more severe man than his brother Jack for his sake. Besides, Shorty was not one of the chaps who got over anything easily, and I knew failure would go hard with him.

Jack was not the only "obstacle." Sam Parker, Nettie's papa, also objected. He was not a stern, unreasonable parent, by any means, but his objections, even if presented good naturedly, were none the less formidable. Parker was a shrewd man, with a total disbelief in the ability of womankind to use reason.

Nettie was the only daughter and the youngest child in a family of seven, and the old man, close-fisted as he was, spared no expense in educating her liberally. It was only natural, therefore, for him to object, especially as Nettie was only eighteen, and had only been out of school a few months.

He called on Jack one afternoon, not casually, as he usually called, on his way to or from town, but with a direct purpose. Jack lay on the sofa. I was reading to him when Parker walked in.

"How are you, Fleming? Laid up, are you? How are you, Faber? Warm, isn't it? Thanks, I will sit down for a minute."

And he sat down on the edge of a chair, and began tracing figures on the floor with his cane. He seemed nervous, and I rose to leave the room; but he waved his hand and said:

"Sit still, Wilson; sit still. I haven't got anything to say but what you may hear."

Here the old man stiffened up in his seat, and stated the object of his mission in a good-natured but thoroughly decided way, closing with:

"Now, Fleming, I haven't got any objection to him—not in the least. He's a tip-top good boy, and all that; but it isn't in reason that I'm going to spend all that money in educating a daughter, and then let her go and marry another youngster without any money. And that's what it'll come to."

Now, Parker's remarks were in the nature of a revelation to us. Of course, we knew Shorty had put in a good many evenings at the Parker domicile, but we had never guessed that his visits had any significance. A courtship, too, with six big brothers hanging round, is a difficult matter.

It is easy enough to fall — just fall — in love with a girl if there is no one to hinder. But with six young men, with whom one is on good terms, sitting round and occupying a large portion of one's attention, it is a matter of getting in love, which, accomplished, is rather more serious than a mere fall into the same.

Fleming sat up and ran his fingers through his hair gravely.

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Parker," he said. "I don't know what to say to Percy, but I will try a little strategy, and see if he can't be kept at home more. If that doesn't work, I must talk to him."

And here began my connection with Shorty's love affair.

That evening I was writing busily when someone opened the door of my den and walked in. It was Shorty. He sat down quietly and took up a paper, which he looked at for several minutes, while I scratched away at my work. Then he threw down the paper suddenly, and turned to me with: "Wilson, what was old Parker here for to-day?"

I tried to dissemble, but Shorty is no fool, and interrupted.

"Oh, nonsense," said he, "you think I'm a baby. Now, honestly, what was he here for?"

Finally, I told him about the conversation between his brother and Parker. He sat silent for a few minutes. I could see his face twitch. Then he turned his eyes to me and said slowly: "Wilson, I know I'm young and all that, but—I know my own mind. Jack's a good brother, and feels in duty bound to take care of me, but I fancy I can look after myself. I—I've made up my mind to marry that girl, if she'll have me, and all the Jacks and Parkers in the world can't stop me."

And Mr. Percival Fleming set his mouth hard, and

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walked out. He called at Parker's the next evening, despite Jack's strategy.

There was another caller at Parker's that evening in the person of Morris Cottrell, a wealthy merchant from a neighbouring town. Shorty, when he got home, mentioned the fact to me with some feeling in his tones. Cottrell was a man of forty, well read, and a gentleman, and the prospect of having him for a rival would have sent despair to the heart of any penniless young man less determined than Shorty Fleming.

One evening Shorty came to my room. He had seen Sam Parker that day, and the latter had told him, as gently as possible, some galling truths about his age and his penniless condition, concluding with the cheerful information that Nettie had almost decided to accept Cottrell.

Of course, Shorty was despondent, but he was none the less determined.

"Wilson, I am going to see her to-morrow afternoon, and—and ask her," he said.

The time and the hour favoured Shorty; but I hardly think Nettie knew her own mind. The boy who came riding slowly home through the shadows next evening was a very much downcast boy indeed.

He told me all about it later—how Nettie had wavered, and finally told him that she could give him no answer. She cared a great deal for him, she said, but she was not sure she cared enough for him. Besides, her father objected to him, and she could never cross her father's wishes, when he had done so much for her.

Sam Parker must have heard of this interview, and made up his mind to do something. Although he was usually so good-natured, he was as determined as a bull-dog, and I think he used some influence in deciding matters, for two weeks later he dropped in to tell Jack that Nettie and Cottrell would be married two months later.

Shorty must have seen news in my face, for after supper he drew me aside and asked me what I knew. I hated to tell him, but did so, the best way I could. The poor lad stood still as a stone for several seconds. Then, with a shuddering sob, he turned away. In the morning he was gone with his horse and clothes, leaving no word.

Jack and I talked it over during the day, and he expressed a great deal of regret, thinking, however, that Nettie had decided for herself, and that Shorty had no one to blame for his failure.

"If it had been different," he went on, "and Percy had persevered and won, I would, too, have given in, and I think Parker would as well, for next year Percy will come into a little money. You see, I have never told him of it because I wanted him to grow up on his own merits, and be self-reliant. I think it has been for the best. Joe never knew, until he was of age, that he had anything, and we didn't tell Percy of it then, because he was only seventeen. Joe put his money into the farm here, and kept quiet about it."

He sat silent for a minute, then continued.

"Of course, this is between ourselves. But—do you know, I wish the boy had won. He's a good deal of a man, and, now I come to think of it, the affair has hit him hard. They could have waited a couple of years, you know." And Jack walked off slowly, taking long whiffs at his pipe.

Weeks passed, during which I saw Nettie Parker several times. She seemed indifferent. Her laugh was not the jolly laugh I had been accustomed to hear, and she seemed pensive at times. Was it her approaching wedding, or—Shorty? I hoped it was Shorty. But somehow when people pine they seem to lose colour and get thin, and Nettie Parker did neither. And still no word from Shorty, and the day for the wedding only a week away.

The people for miles round were invited to the wedding, which old Sam Parker said would "make people talk." I rode into town on behalf of Jack and myself for something to present to the bride-elect. In the post-office some one tapped me on the shoulder. I turned. It was Shorty Fleming—Shorty, smiling quite happily.

"How long before you will be going out?" he asked.

"I'm ready now."

"All right! Wilson, go and borrow a horse until to-morrow—tell them yours is lame, and you'll have to lead him. Nobody has recognised me in this overcoat, hat, and false moustache, and I don't want them to. I'll walk out, and walk up the road. Hurry up with the horses!"

The half-hundred guests at Parker's had been enjoying themselves to the full. All of Mrs. Parker's good things had been stowed away where they would do the most good. The minister from town was getting ready for the ceremony, for a special license had actually been obtained, and the guests were bustling about, amid some confusion, trying to find the best points for observation. Nettie Parker, pale for once, stood near the front door, pulling her fingers nervously, waiting supposedly for her father.

Someone knocked at the door. Nettie pulled it open, gave a little cry, seized a man's hat from the back of a chair and an overcoat from a peg near by, and rushed out, slamming the door. Everybody who saw the performance stood still—dazed. Then, as we heard horses' hoofs clattering up the road, there was a rush for the outside.

Up the road, disappearing fast, were two horses, whose riders were evidently in a hurry. There was another rush—this time for the stables—led by old Sam Parker. But, somehow, the doors would not open. They had been nailed up very securely by a person who was at that moment making hypocritical efforts to get one of them open.

At this juncture, Cottrell, as cool as if he had never thought of attending his own wedding, came up and spoke quietly to old Parker, who was so dazed that he had not as yet opened his mouth.

The old man started and turned to those who were near. I missed what he said, for Cottrell spoke to me.

"I told the old gentleman that it was no use trying to stop them. If they mean to get married, they will."

Then in a tone that contained no trace of bitterness, he continued:

"It is far better to have happened now than—than later. And, as it is, I think there will be only one unhappy person instead of three."

That was Morris Cottrell—philosopher and man.

Mr. and Mrs. Percival Fleming sent their address and were invited to return. When he saw them, Parker remarked: "You have got some nerve for a boy. Are you not both ashamed of yourselves?"

No, they were not; and after Nettie had had a good cry in her father's arms, the runaways were ready to receive the congratulations of their friends, foremost among whom was Morris Cottrell.

Holland Clark.

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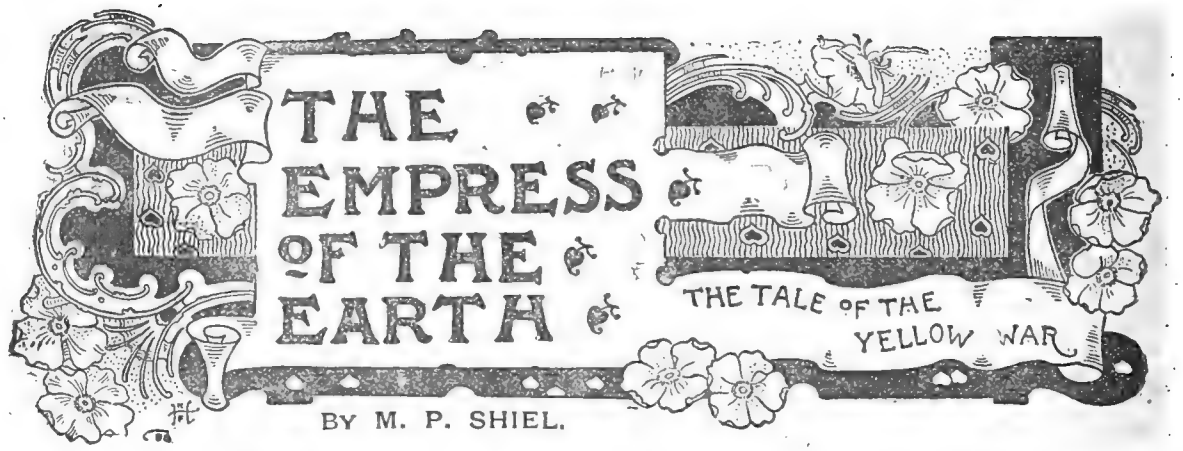

By M. P. SHIEL.

SUMMARY.

Yen How, a shrewd Chino-Japanese doctor, falls desperately in love with Ada Seward, an English nursemaid. His advances are rudely repulsed, however; but he leaves England with a fixed determination to win the object of his affections in spite of all opposition.

Yen How goes first to Japan as a Japanese, where he becomes intimate with the prime minister, Marquis Ito, to whom he proposes a league between the two races of China and Japan, and an immense scheme by which Europe may be reduced to a waste, and China become the Empress of the Earth with scarcely an effort of her own. He then goes to China and becomes virtual ruler of that nation. In the course of a conversation which he has with Li Hung Chang he unfolds his scheme for setting all the European Powers against Great Britain. After the slaughter China will step in and conquer the remnants of the armies.

War is declared between Great Britain and France and Germany and Russia. The British fleet meets the Allied ships in Mid-channel and a battle ensues. Although the British vessels are outnumbered by two to one, the superior tactics of the British, and of John Hardy, a consumptive midshipman and a genius for modern warfare (who escapes on the *Jupiter* from the fight, and rams all the transports some distance away), result in the destruction of the Allied fleet. Hardy is ill for a time, and on his recovery decides to go to China. Before going, however, he endeavours to obtain a promise of marriage from Miss Bosey Jay, a young lady artist, but is refused. He goes to the Palace Theatre of Varieties, and there meets Ada Seward, the nursemaid with whom Yen How is in love. She sends him home intoxicated, and a week later he is in Paris, where he has a row with Edropol, the Bulgarian duellist. John, however, does not fight, but goes to Berlin, and from thence to Petersburg. Here he sends a letter to Bobbie, his old servant in England, and starts out for China by the overland route. Yen How organises an army of 400,000,000 souls—men, women, and children—to overrun Europe when the time is ripe. He is sitting in his garden when the capture of John Hardy is announced to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

John and Yen.

John Hardy, having arrived at Vladivostok, had engaged an interpreter, and spent two whole days in trying to charter some sort of craft to take him to Nagasaki, where he hoped either to meet his ship, or hear about her *locale*.

His impatience was nothing less than fevered; for, through his interpreter, he heard that no *rencontre* had as yet taken place between the hostile fleets; but that, within a week or so, it was expected that the allied French, German and Russian vessels would meet the allied British and Japanese in battle. Such was the report brought by junks from Nagasaki and Fusan, and by caravan from Newchwang and Kin-chow.

An engagement had hitherto not occurred for the simple reason that the French, German and Russian fleets had practically been in hiding from the British; and the reason why they had been in hiding was the very simple one that they were finding extraordinary difficulties in the matter of coaling, the British and Japanese having, as a matter of fact, created a "corner" by buying up nearly all the coal to be obtained in the East some weeks previously; so that from Singapore to Vladivostok the cry had been coal! coal!

Now, however, as it seemed—so said the reports—the French, German, and Russian vessels had coal in plenty! Whence this supply had come, no one could conceive. It was a mystery—but a certainty.

The battle, therefore, so long delayed, must come soon.

John Hardy's pulses beat faster when this forecast reached him; and his chagrin was intense when, after anxious search, he found no *compradors* willing or able to secure him a passage to Nagasaki. The East was in suspense, waiting with panting heart for the future, without interest in the present. It turned a listless ear to John Hardy's pleadings.

Nothing remained for it but Port Arthur, where, as he was told, he would be sure to find a willing junk. But the journey was immense, slow, arduous. John Hardy almost gave up hope of being in time for the battle.

But with strong heart he set out. He anticipated no danger on entering Chinese territory. China was not formally at war with England. He did not know that, even in times of the most settled quietude, no traveller's life was worth a rush in Northern China—witness the case of Sir Harry Parks.

He had with him quite a little retinue; and he travelled in a palanquin borne between mules.

The northern Chinese were a hard, ferocious, and treacherous race—considerably more so than the southern. They were also very much larger and stronger men,—rascals tall, and lean, and brawny, their bony toughness being derived from the Tartar blood with which the northern Chinese tribes were infused. Their language, too, was very different to the southern dialects, and, above all, their walk. The southerners walked on the flat of their feet like Europeans; the northerners swung along on their heels, with a backward slant of the body, like a statue put to lean with its back against a wall.

At Hunshun John Hardy stopped to rest for a night at a little two-roomed inn; and here it was that, as soon as he was asleep, a consultation occurred between the whole body of villagers and John's retinue of five.

The next morning, suspecting nothing, he went forward, this time in a shaky *jinricksha*, or Chinese mule-cart. He could no longer bear the swinging between the palanquin-mules. It had reduced him to a state of weakness, and he was now spitting up phlegm streaked with blood.

At every village now that they came to they were surrounded by increasing crowds, and increasing clamours. But always John's servants spoke some words to the people, which had the effect of restraining them. As he set out afresh, a throng of those skeleton visages would be there to gape greedily after him: but still, he did set out.

A sickness of the heart—a sickness of the stomach—grew upon him.

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Could Man—could Woman—be like this?

Every nerve in his gentle and loving nature rose in shuddering revolt against this race.

He saw the whisperings and confabulations between his men and the mobs, and, with his instinct for truth, suspected treachery. But he was now quite helpless.

Everywhere, as he advanced, his eye noted the drilling, drilling, to which the nation was being subjected.

But he was now very sick, and languid, and day by day sat propped against the side of the cart, staring wearily before him, under the growing heat of the sun. He was compelled to keep up his strength with sips of the deleterious Chinese spirit *samshu*; and the only food which he could procure for days was the sickening mess of rice and greens which forms the staple Chinese diet.

He descended the river Yalu in a gorgeously painted junk, drawn on each bank by a mule. Here he had some rest, lying in long dreams of quietude through the starlit nights of a Chinese spring on the deck of the junk. Never had the heavens and the earth seemed to him so lovely, and so enthralled in a mystery of peace, as in those vast sheeny nights of his descent of the Yalu. At Wigu he commenced the land-journey again, on mule-back this time, somewhat recovered in health.

He was given now to understand that he was being guided toward Port Arthur. Instead of this, he was being led northwards, toward Moukden.

At Moukden was a garrison of the old regular army; and the railway from thence to Tientsin, commenced some time before, had lately been completed.

At an inn at Moukden he was eating, when a Japanese officer, accompanied by an interpreter, entered the room, and bade John follow him. It was Yen How's decree that any white man found by chance in Northern China should be sent on to Pekin.

John Hardy was ineffably surprised, first, at finding himself in Moukden, and next in being hustled into a queer, low, dark railway-train, in the keeping of half-a-dozen gigantic pig-tails.

"But," he protested through his interpreter, "England is not at war with China!"

"No," said the Japanese with a grin, "but China is at war with England."

In the train, John's wrists were bound tight with a cord. His interpreter and servants had disappeared.

They reached Tientsin by train, and thence went on to the village of Tung-chow, five miles from Pekin, by junk up the Peiho. Just as the sun set they arrived at the mighty walls of Pekin, and had only time to rush between the gates, when the ponderous jaws of the city-portals clanged and roared behind them.

Pekin! multitudinous, unfathomable city, place of beauty and of horror, of romance, and of infamy! city of vast triple-boulevards, grand as the imagination of an architect, loathsome as the stench of a sewer, city of gauds and colours, vermilion, and emerald, and blue, and of temples, and avenues, of palaces and lakes and parks, immense, a world in itself, resembling in its tone and aspect no other of the cities of man!

Here only may the hoariness of our race on the earth, the vast age of the old world, be read even by the blind.

Whoever is a Dreamer, let him go and busy himself in Pekin. The city is itself a dream—an opium-dream.

It was necessary for John Hardy and his captors to pass through both the Tartar and the Chinese cities before reaching the Imperial City. Each of these three is inclosed within its own massive walls, independently of the great wall of the whole town. The Imperial City was sacred ground. Here resided the Supreme Power, and here also the Legations. The profane foot entered it on pain of death.

They passed through a number of thoroughfares, broad as three or four Holborns laid side by side, and long as vistas; streets thronging with camels, and jingling mules, and the booths of small merchants, and swaying pig-tails; and in an hour reached the Imperial Portal on mule-back.

The leader of the little band produced his brevet, and gained admittance. They proceeded slowly through a park, leading their animals now, and after traversing a number of secluded granite streets, and a long marble colonnade, entered the courtyard of a vast, low, white palace.

John Hardy, as they halted, leant wearily upon his mule. There was a hollow pain at his chest, and at the back of his shoulders. His lips were dry and cracked.

A door opened at the side of the courtyard, and a soft-footed official came to learn the reason of this intrusion.

A few words were spoken, and he turned away. In a quarter of an hour he was back again; and five minutes afterwards Yen How and John Hardy were face to face. For quite a minute Yen How continued to read his paper.

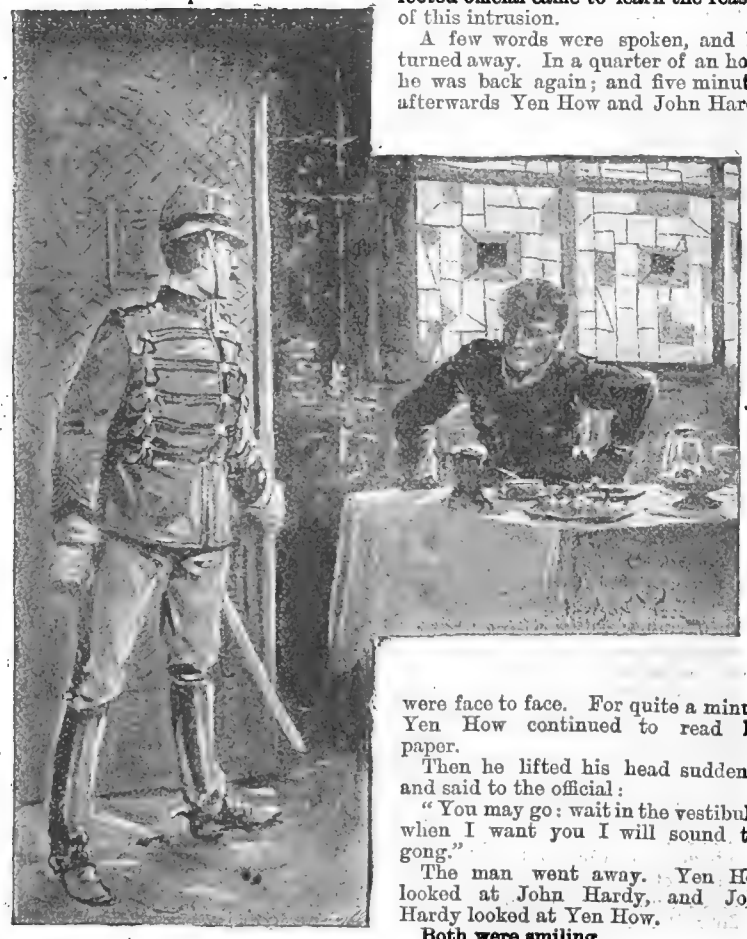
Then he lifted his head suddenly, and said to the official:

"You may go: wait in the vestibule: when I want you I will sound the gong."

The man went away. Yen How looked at John Hardy, and John Hardy looked at Yen How.

Both were smiling.

Yen How had still under his eye a slight scar where the fist of the



A Japanese officer entered the room.

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English soldier, John Brabant, had struck him in London. John Hardy's hands were unbound. This had been done ever since he had reached Tungchow when it had been necessary for him to mount a mule. He had on his usual blue pea-jacket; and under this, in the breast pocket, his loaded revolver.

In the colloquy which followed, one of these two men spoke an English as perfectly grammatical as that used by Tennyson or Macaulay, though with an intensely foreign something in his way of speaking it; the other spoke broken English. It was Yen How who used the good, and John Hardy the bad English.

"Who are you, sir?" said Yen How.

"Me Englishman," said John, "name John Hardy."

Yen had heard of the Battle of Shoreham, and he never forgot a name. He said:

"Don't talk pigeon English. I can understand you. I have lived some years in England."

"Oh, veer goot. Me no knowee that. Me talk good English to Chinaman."

"As you please. What is it you have come to China for?"

"Me sailor. Me come from Russia to Vladivostok to joinee my ship. What for you no letee me join it? Englishman and Chinaman good friends."

"Since when?"

"For always."

"You got a sister?"

John was surprised.

"No," he said.

"A female cousin?"

"Yes. Well,——"

"Will you give me your cousin for my wife?"

John grinned.

"Why, you queer Chin-chin-Chinaman!" he cried out.

"Ah, you say no, you see. Englishman and Chinaman are not such very good friends, then."

The chief fact about John Hardy was that he had eyes which saw a fact. As these last words fell upon his ears, he looked keenly into the placid face before him; and at once he realised that he was in the presence, not so much of a Chinaman, as of a Mind.

Instantly the instinct to speak pigeon-English left him. Unconsciously he began to speak naturally. This was a great compliment to Yen How.

"But look here, Mr. Chinaman," he said, "what is all this for? Who are you?"

"Well, since you ask, I am called Yen How."

John started.

"Ah! You know my name, I see," said Yen How; "I know yours, too."

"Yes. Very good—I am glad that I find myself with you, since you are who you are. You are acquainted with European ideas, and certainly a man of sense. I wish to throw myself on your benevolence. I find myself in such a silly sort of scrape. I am a poor sailor trying to join my ship. Knowing China as a friendly country, I thought I should have no difficulty in passing through. Yet here I am! What for? Isn't it very absurd? Please help me to get out of this! If you cannot set me free of your own power, you can at least put me in communication with the British Ambassador——"

Yen How's eyes went small in a smile.

"There isn't any British Ambassador any more," he said.

"How do you mean, sir?" asked John.

"It is the Chinese custom to hang thieves by the heels, head downwards," replied Yen. "The British Ambassador has been hanged by the heels in the square before the Pekin Temple of Confucius, and died while the people were torturing him with hot irons."

John Hardy's left eye-lid lowered in intense menace.

"That is not really so, Mr. Chinaman?"

"It is, my son."

"And whose doing was that? Not the Government of China's?"

"It was *my* doing, my son."

"Yours, Yen How?"

"Mine."

Now the two men were really in contact. They looked into each other's eyes, searchingly, eye to eye.

"You shocking little devil!" said John Hardy.

"Call me what you like. I will repay your insult by a compliment: you are a brave fellow."

"You will be strangled like a frog for this, Mr. Chinaman!"

"Whom by? All the Englishmen in China are dead."

"All?"

"Every one."

"A massacre?"

"A regular sacrament of death."

"But the Chinese believe in a God above, I think?"

"Pooh! not much."

"*You* do not?"

"Not I."

"And the white men of other nations, were they massacred, too?"

"All—all."

"But with what motive?"

"It would take too long to tell you."

"Ah! I know."

"You do?"

"Yes! I know! I know! I had a queer, dim idea long ago. Now I know! I know!"

"You are shrewd then, as well as brave."

"Yes! I know!"

John Hardy was in an ecstasy of discovery. He saw the skies growing black, black over the earth.

"Well, will you give me your cousin for my wife now?" asked Yen How, all wrinkles.

John did not answer. His brows were knit. It was only after a minute's thought that he made two steps forward, and laid his right hand on Yen How's shoulder, the doctor looking up into his face as he began to speak.

"Now, look you, Yen How," John said, "I know now, as I tell you, what your idea is like. Let me put it in plain words: you mean to sweep with this Chinese nation over Europe when our war is over, and Europe is made ready for your coming. I was a fool not to see it quite before—but that is it. And this idea is *yours*, yours only, Yen How: I see that. You have the face of a devil, you toad, you have! Well, I have got an offer to make you—a challenge—if you are man enough to accept it. Get me out of this—put me on board my ship, and I will undertake to fight you, and beat you. I alone, Yen, against you alone. If you beat me, I give you not my cousin, but the Queen's daughters for your wives. If I beat you, I squeeze the life out of your throat, you frog. I promise you that I shall breathe not a word of this plan of yours to a living soul—no one shall know from me: and no one shall know from me about the massacre, and the drilling of the people. I make you that offer, Yen."

John Hardy had recognised the great Mind in Yen How; now it was Yen How's turn to recognise the same in John Hardy. Here was the world-big Thought, the sun-kindled Imagination.

Yen How answered:

"Take your hand from my shoulder, my son."

"Well, what do you say, Yen?"

"I say that your thought tickles me, boy!"

"Is that all?"

"And I say, that if I were to accept your offer, you could go back to your ship saying to yourself: 'The great Yen How has recognised me as one of the two kings of the world.'"

"Still, I wait for your answer."

"How am I to count upon the silence you promise?"

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"Well, you know something of English life. I come of a family of English gentlemen. We never break our word."

"Well, come, we shall see. Your thought—what shall I say?—tickles me, my son. We shall see—come now. But first—do you know that I gave an order for your beheading? And then I said I would see you. Do you know why? I had a question to ask you."

"Well?"

"Have you lived in London?"

"Yes—sometimes."

"Ah, well—there is just a chance, then. Did you ever know a lillee girl called—what's her name?—Ah! Ada Seward?"

Yen How could destroy a world without the quivering of a nerve; but as he uttered this name in a whisper, he thrilled, and trembled.

John did not answer. The name sounded familiar. He hung his head with knit brow, thinking. Suddenly he blushed. He had remembered—the music-hall—the drunken night—Lottie Collins—Ada.

Yen saw the blush.

To this man, drunk with his passion, it was inconceivable that any other man could see this girl, and not straightway go mad for love. Men will sometimes get so intoxicated with wine, that the sober state becomes inconceivable to them; and they will say to a sober companion: "Oh, you *are* far gone, my boy!"

Yen saw the blush, and he noticed now that John Hardy's face was more than usually lovely, even for one of a lovely race. Would not Ada Seward love that face if she had ever seen it?

"You have seen her?" He half rose from his seat, and brought his mouth in an intense, secret, cunning whisper close to John's ear.

"I have," said John.

He had an instinct, even then, that he was running some frightful danger in making this avowal. But he was truthful in a very rigid, and rather old-fashioned sense. He had never told a falsehood.

"You have?—in real truth?" whispered Yen.

"I have."

"And—*kissed* her—eh, boy?"

The Chinaman's face worked. He hissed rather than spoke these words.

John grinned.

"Why, you queer Chinaman——!" he cried.

"You have!"

"What?"

"Kissed her—eh? eh, John Hardy?"

"Of course I have kissed her."

"Then you die!"

"What, for kissing Miss Seward?"

"You die, I say!"

"It was she who kissed me."

"You die! you die, you little white devil! you die! you die!"

Up went the fingers of Yen's right arm, twinkling in ecstatic wrath.

There was no mistaking Yen How. He meant this.

He pounded the gong twice with the hammer.

"In one half hour ——" he said, with a furious nod of the head at John.

John Hardy, perfectly cool, saw clearly that all hope for himself was lost. But he had no intention of leaving Yen How behind him to work his mischief in the world.

The second sound of the gong had hardly shivered and clanged, when John Hardy, with the revolver whipped from his breast-pocket, blew Yen How—passion, schemes, ambitions and all—out of existence.

In intention, that is—in absolute, cool unerringness of aim. The bullet struck Yen precisely over the centre of his heart. But it struck a plate of steel mail, and did not penetrate.

Blew Yen How out of existence.

John was about to fire a second shot at Yen's head, when suddenly the two men were locked in desperate conflict. Yen had flung himself upon John.

Yen's eye had long before noted the bulge of John's pea-jacket over the breast. He was half-prepared for what had happened.

The struggle was carried on with the entire physical force of the two combatants, the revolver being the aim of both efforts.

John, though below the middle height, was quite an inch or so taller than Yen; and he was able, with his left hand, to seize Yen's pig-tail, and draw it in a single coil tight round Yen's throat; while Yen inclosed the other's right hand and ribs in a grip of iron, squeezing with all his energy, and heaving and slanting his adversary in the effort to effect a throw.

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The physical force of the tough little Chinaman was quite two or three times that of the frail English lad.

This contest of strengths was a foreboding—and a resemblance—of the larger national contest which was impending.

John Hardy was comparatively weak. But in his right hand was a revolver, representing the Science of Western Civilisation, which, however, Yen's grip was rendering ineffectual; and in John's left hand was Yen's pig-tail, representing the barbarism, the superstition, the repulsive Soul of the East.

Yen's face darkened. A gurgling sound came from his swollen lips. The rat was being suffocated by means of its own tail. The West was strangling the East.

Suddenly the revolver went off, and the bullet entered Yen How's left foot. The Science of the West had uttered a cry.

But the West was breathing its last gasps under the stringent ferocious grasp of the East.

He fell at once flat on his back.

The contest was short, and it ended suddenly. A little spout of blood welled and rolled from John Hardy's lips; and at once he lost power and fainted.

Before he could fall to the ground, an attendant had come up, and struck him a blow on the brow with a heavy bamboo. He fell at once flat on his back, his face covered with blood.

Almost immediately Yen How was cool.

"Take him away," he said. "He has attempted my life—he must not be killed."

"The torture, Your Excellency?"

"Yes. But I will direct it myself. Go away."

He sat again, as the attendant lifted John in his brawny arms. He commenced once more to read the *Mercury*.

He knew that there was a bullet in his foot. But he would not move: the racking pain was sweet to him.

The intensity of the Chinese instinct of Vengeance is a mystery. It is not human—it is not bestial—it may be demonic. To us, at all events, it is incomprehensible.

To them pain is joy, if, at the same time, they can gloat over the knowledge that it is in their power to take a thousandfold vengeance on the causer of the pain. They hug their pangs—they wantonly put off the hour of their revenge—they roll in a secret luxury of malice.

In the matter of Torture, the Chinese have excelled all nations in a devilish cunning. They have investigated the nerves of man, and adapted their plagues to them with a nice and minute ingenuity. And Yen was more ingenious than the most ingenious.

He intended to give his mind to this matter. Meantime, he went on reading.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Vanished Fleet.

It was about twenty hours before John Hardy, in some absolutely dark place, again opened his eyes. At about the same time, the battle at which he had hoped and striven to be present was going forward.

For over a year the question which had been agitating many an English mind was this: Is our weight of metal in Chinese waters enough? Is it commensurate with possible contingencies? Is it not too hopelessly small?

This anxiety had been somewhat allayed by the spectacle of ship after ship of the British navy—the *Barfleur*, the *Bonaventure*, the *Hannibal*, the *Gibraltar*—steaming away in mysterious haste to the East.

On the other hand, they had not steamed away alone: they had followed—they had been followed by—a host of the choicest, mightiest ships of Russia, France, and Germany, all hasting Eastward, Eastward, as if in the sweep of some Law of gravitation, all with the same secret urgency, the same suggestion of mystery, and flurry, and design.

Heavy Russian armaments like the *Vladimir Monomach*, had hurried after French craft like the *Pascal*, and German craft like the *Gefion*. An addition of some 30,000 tons to her Chinese navy was made by Russia alone in her ships the *Rossiya*, the *Cissoi Veliki*, the *Navarin*.

This Eastern fever had infected even other nations, not precisely in the running. Away in the sweep of the Chinese Current went battle-ships from Italy, from Austria, from America.

In a few months the seas of the Far East were gravid with the navies of the world.

China, herself, by way of pantomime, had been building cruisers at the Vulcan Dockyards at Stettin; and at that very time was promenading the boulevards of the seas, quite like one of the *chic*, with the new *Hi-Chi*, *Hi-Tien*, and *Hai-Shen*.

The *Hi-Chi* had a speed of twenty-four knots an hour, and was a cruiser carrying an armament as heavy as many vessels of twice her displacement.

The fleet of Japan was in prime fighting order, exquisitely modern, as smart as it was swift and strong. It was worth any two of the fleets in Chinese waters put together.

Was Britain's weight of metal sufficient? This was the question.

The fact was, that Britain had ceased to be acutely anxious when it was once known that her weight was greater than that of any two of the other European nations combined.

She had added 37,000 tons, in round numbers, to her former Chinese squadron; Russia 36,000; France 11,000. But, all told, she had concentrated 126,700 tons in those waters, whereas Russia's total was only 83,000, and France's 26,000. It followed, therefore, that Britain had a preponderance of some 17,700 tons over these two.

This had seemed enough, considering that some of Russia's terra-cotta coloured ships were rather old-fashioned.

It was hardly remembered that there was Germany, too, with a weight of 27,000 tons in Chinese waters. Russia, France, and Germany together had a preponderance over Britain of nearly 10,000 tons.

The fact was sufficiently impressive in itself; but it had not been terrifying, even to those who remembered the possibility of the German element being hostile to the British, when they also remembered the splendid fleet of—Japan.

Here was an additional element of 200,000 tons—all on the side of Britain.

For was not Japan the friend and ally of England? Were not their interests identical? The Britain of the East, and the Britain of the West—how natural that they should stand shoulder to shoulder!

But there was one question, in connection with this queer, outlandish, yellow ally of England, the correct answer to

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which would have sent as great a shock through England, could she have known it, as she had ever received in her history. The question was this: "Where on earth, during the early part of April, 1899, did the Allied Fleet in Eastern waters get their supplies of coal from?"

We have already stated that England and Japan, by a clever deal, had, some weeks before, effected a corner in nearly all the Welsh and other coal in the East.

Yet on the morning of the 19th of April, the whole Allied navy, which some little time before had been almost immobilised for lack of steam-fuel, and which had been hiding and dodging, each ship for herself, all about the Northern Chinese coasts, now steamed gallantly past Quelpart in search of the British fleet, supposed to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Chemulpo.

They were steering north-west; Nagasaki lay south-east of them; they were therefore coming from the direction of Japan. Could it be that it was from Japan that they had obtained this coal?

And where was the fleet of Japan? For two days Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Seymour had been expecting it, by previous arrangement, to appear off Chemulpo. But as yet it gave no sign.

The Vice-Admiral was not at first precisely anxious; for his only ground of suspicion that anything was wrong in China was the fact, reported to him at Hong Kong six days before, that absolutely all communication between that island and the mainland had mysteriously ceased. Yen How had cunningly left the Englishmen on Hong Kong alive, having no desire to have every Chinese port shelled by British guns. Hence, when the Vice-Admiral coaled and started northward hurriedly on receipt of a telegram from Tokio, stating that the Allied fleet had managed to procure some coal, and were steaming eastward upon Japan, he had no suspicion of the massacre. His reply to Tokio was that he was starting northward at once, and would avoid an engagement, if possible, until the junction of the two fleets was effected; and he instructed the Japanese fleet to join him at Chemulpo.

But at Chemulpo he received a slight shock. There was no white man in the place.

All he could suppose was that there had been a rising in the town, and that the white men had been killed.

But he hardly attached any political importance to the fact. Such things were common in China.

At first he waited on with perfect confidence for the appearance of the Japanese fleet.

The next morning he received a cable dispatched from Nagasaki to Fusan, and brought on two hundred miles on mule-back to Chemulpo. It was as follows:

"The Allied fleets, plentifully supplied with coal, are about to steam eastward in search of you. Japanese fleet will follow."

"Steam *eastward!*" "Supplied with coal?" "*Will* follow?" Certainly, now, if ever man was puzzled, it was the British Vice-Admiral.

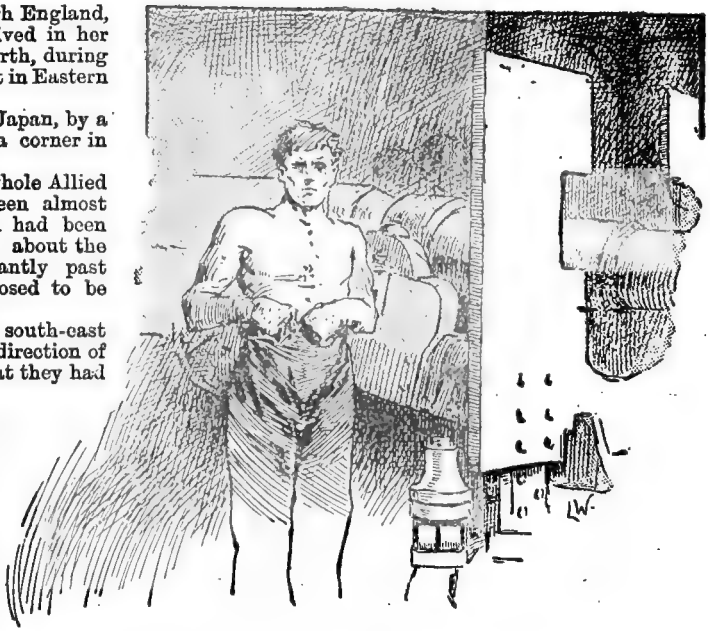
For if the enemy were steaming eastward supplied with coal, that meant Japanese treachery. But if Japan were treacherous, and had joined the Allies, why on earth did she take the pains to warn the British of their advance?

And why "*will*" follow? They should have set out, according to the Vice-Admiral's instructions, long before. If they had not already set out they were treacherous; but if they were treacherous, why did they give this warning of it, instead of taking the advantage of a surprise?

That they were not neutral, seemed proved by the fact that they were "following" at all.

The Vice-Admiral's brow was a heavy cloud of care. He decided that the cable was a hoax, and then that that was impossible, and then again that it was a hoax.

Suddenly he sent a small expedition of blue-jackets by road to Seoul to see who was there. They returned with the announcement that there were no white men in Seoul.



Belted his trousers with a determined snap.

The secret of Japan's action, though inscrutable, was this: She coaled the Allies in order that they might destroy the British; and she warned the British in order that they might destroy the Allies.

She helped both sides, being the enemy of both.

But this policy was too subtle for the British Commander to divine without an absolute clue.

The absence of white men at Seoul, as well as at Chemulpo, was merely an added shock. It brought no real light to the Vice-Admiral's mind.

Two days he spent in coaling the fleet out of four colliers which had accompanied him from Hong Kong, and in taking in stores from the store-ships. At the end of the second day, there was still no sign of the yellow ally of England.

The thing was so inexplicable, that wonderment could find no words. Japan was a nation among nations, civilised, responsible, presumably careful to keep her pledged word. What, then, could have happened?

"What, in Heaven's name, *has* happened?" said the Vice-Admiral to himself twenty times during the course of that terrible and sleepless night.

But he did not neglect the warning of Japan's cable. The next morning, immediately after the saluting of the colours, the fleet steamed from Chemulpo harbour, the flag-ship being the *Barfleur*, one of the only two line-of-battle-ships among the ships.

The Vice-Admiral had no intention of being caught at anchor without sea-room.

Up to the present, no hostile action had taken place in the far East. The approaches to Vladivostok harbour and Kiao-Chau were crowded with mines, and well defended by forts. The Vice-Admiral had preserved his fighting power from injury, till the first naval battle. After that, in the event of his victory, he would proceed to the capture of the hostile ports.

He went cruising south-eastward under half steam.

But what now is that, away yonder on the southern horizon? A long streak of grey mist, which has the property of growing swiftly broader and darker. The

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Japanese fleet at last, surely! No. It is the fleet of the Allied enemy. That is quickly determined by the look-outs.

They numbered twenty-nine, and occupied the whole region of the Southern hemi-horizon.

The British ships were thirty-three. Among them, however, was a very large number of smaller-tonnage craft, torpedo-boat destroyers, first-class gun-boats, second and third class cruisers, dispatch vessels, and sloops of war, of varying weight, from about 4,000 to as low as 260 tons. But there, too, on the other hand, were the great *Terrible* and her sister-cruiser (in whose books was the name of John Hardy, absent), the *Powerful*. These had each a tonnage of 14,200. There, too, were the *Revenge* with 14,150 tons, and the *Gibraltar* with 7,700.

The weight, on the whole, of the enemy was greater, but it was not much greater; and, even so, it was not the custom of Englishmen to count as a deterrent from battle a preponderance of the enemy in mere physical power. The Vice-Admiral banished from his mind for the time the mystery of the Japanese fleet, and sent forth his commands with a high heart, in which hope was uppermost.

Jack, below decks, belted his trousers with a determined snap, and prepared to sink, to fight, to swim, to die, to live.

Already from the conning-towers could be discerned the pea-soup colour of some of the Russian ships, though both fleets were pouring round the horizon two regions of dark smoke.

The British approached in a very wide wedge, the *Barfleur* leading at the apex of the formation, while the enemy maintained a double line, the whole of the first line being composed of Russian vessels, the ponderous *Vladimir Monomach* occupying the central post.

The barb, so to speak, of the British wedge was as strong as possible. On each side of the *Barfleur*, somewhat astern of her, came the *Powerful* and the *Terrible*. It was the intention of the Vice-Admiral to begin well, and to derive all the possible moral prestige which this fact might afford. At the moment when the *Vladimir* was two miles from the *Barfleur*, and three from the *Terrible* and the *Powerful*, the battle commenced on the British side. All the three British vessels had kept their forward barbettes trained upon the *Vladimir*, and they fired simultaneously. The result was just like magic. Before the smoke had cleared, the Russian ship was no longer on the surface of the waters. An instant afterwards the battle was general.

In the fury of warfare which now ensued, let the reader fix his eye upon a middle-sized, and comparatively unimportant ship, which stands far back in the starboard limb of the British wedge; she is called the *Iphigenia*—a second-class cruiser, tonnage, 3,600, horse-power, 7,000; not very wonderfully armoured, but capable of showing a clean pair of heels. On board of *her* is—Fate.

Yonder is the *Gefion*, engaged with the *Terrible*, and yonder, both the *Pascal* and the *Majestueuse* with the *Revenge*, and yonder again the *Barfleur* with the *Invincible*, and the *Powerful* with the *Mendon*. Wide is the war and various. The British wedge has penetrated the fleet of the Allies. The navies of the world are mixed together in a hotch-potch of combat.

There are instances, on one side and the other, of splendid manœuvring, of the right thing done at the right moment, of subtle skill. But these all are individual, between ship and ship, captain and captain. Neither on one side nor the other is there any wide plan, any grand plot, any omnipresent eye. On the whole, it is a question merely of weight of metal against weight of metal. The Great Man is not there.

* * * * *

Slowly, in his dark prison, the Chinese Iron is entering into the soul of John Hardy. He is being taught the meaning of Fear, and familiarity with the face of Pain. This, too, was necessary for him.

(*To be continued.*)

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AN OLD FRIEND BACK AGAIN.

In Mr. James Anthony Froude's book, "Oceana," published twelve years ago, the following passage occurs:

"What England would become was to be seen already in the enormously extended suburbs of London and our great manufacturing cities; miles upon miles of squalid lanes, each house the duplicate of its neighbour; the dirty street in front, the dirty yard behind, the fetid smell from the ill-made sewers, the public-house at the street corners.

"Here, with no sight of a green field, with no knowledge of flowers or forest, the blue heavens themselves dirtied with soot—amidst objects all mean and hideous, with no entertainment but the music hall, no pleasure but in the drink shop — hundreds of thousands of English children are now growing up into men and women. And were these scenes to be indefinitely multiplied? Was this to be the real condition of an ever-increasing portion of the English nation? And was it to be supposed that a race of men could be so reared who could carry on the great traditions of our country?

"I for one could not believe it. The native vigour of our temperament might defy the influence of such a life for a quarter or for half a century. Experience, even natural probability, declared that the grandchildren of the occupants of these dens must be sickly, poor, and stunted wretches, whom no school teaching, however excellent, could save from physical decrepitude."

Some five or six years after the publication of "Oceana," the Fresh Air Fund was started. Its object to an extent was to counteract the very evils of which Mr. Froude spoke. It is still going on. The number of children given a holiday in 1892 was 20,000; last summer that number had risen to 105,000.

Another summer approaches, and it is my pleasant duty to lay the programme before the readers of *S.S.*

But *S.S.* is always adding new readers, and, for the benefit of these, I will say here that the Fresh Air Fund was inaugurated for the purpose of giving poor children a day's holiday in the country, with plenty to eat and drink, at the small cost of 9d. each. This amount includes railway fare and two good meals. The only qualification is that the children are needy and in want of a holiday.

As before, the work of organisation is in the hands of the Ragged School Union, *S.S.* and its companion publications finding the money, and quite recently the Secretary of the Union, and a representative from this office, have visited each centre of population to which the F.A.F. has been extended, for the purpose of concluding arrangements for this year. The total number of places benefited now reaches twenty-five, including London. Gateshead and Dundee have this year been included in the list to the extent of 2,000 children each. Full particulars regarding the various committees and number of children in each town will probably appear next week.

The total number of children arranged for is 105,000. Of course, as many more than that will be given a treat as we receive money to pay for; but 105,000 is our minimum goal.

Each season is worked independently of another, the money received being used up entirely. But we have received £372 10s. during the winter months, so that we have a goodly sum with which to start operations.

To carry out the programme, £4,252 10s. will be required, so there is still a balance of £3,880 to be collected.

It remains for the generous-hearted readers of *S.S.* again to put their hands into their pockets and draw forth the "nimble ninepences." You can send nine stamps, and use another for the envelope—making tenpence in all. It will be nothing to you. But see what happiness you will give to a poor little boy or girl in one of our large cities! Remember every penny of the amount received in subscriptions is spent on the children, nothing being deducted for working expenses. These are borne equally by the R.S.U and "Pearson's."

I don't ask you to forward a large amount. I don't expect more from you than you can afford. I do expect that. It is in a manner your fund, and I want you to support it. The readers of *S.S.* are all one large family, with the editor at the head, and he pleads the cause of poor little outcast children who will have no holiday in the country unless the money comes to hand.

Don't withhold your mite because no excursions have been arranged in your town. At one time only London was dealt with. Then towns with populations of 250,000 were added. Now nearly every place with a population over 100,000 is included. So you see it may be the turn of your town sometime.

The Fresh Air Fund is a national institution, its ramifications extending every year.

Anyone who can help the movement by collecting amongst friends, can have a collecting sheet by applying for it at this office. These sheets set forth the objects of the collection, so that there is no need to explain the reason for asking for money. The sheet speaks for itself.

Now then, everyone of you see if you can't make this a record year. Every year since the Fund started the amount received has increased. Don't go back on what you have already done. *We must not go back.* The F.A.F. motto must be "Onward!"

All subscriptions will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly.*

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A Lucky Find.

Arthur Park, the artist, and I, had just had a good dinner at one of the best restaurants, and were buttoning our overcoats under our chins as we stepped out into the street, when a young fellow, bright enough as to appearance, but still wearing his summer clothes, almost ran into us.

"Why, hallo, Billy, old man!" exclaimed Park.

The other replied in a low tone, and Park drew him to one side. In a moment I heard my friend say. "Oh, that's all right, old man—any time, any time. Good night—look in at the studio some day."

He took my arm and we crossed the street to a waiting cab.

"Poor devil of an art student," he explained; "living on hope and faith in himself. Didn't ask for it, but I lent him a sovereign."

We stepped into the hansom and he added: "Have any troubles of your own when you first began to scribble?"

"I remember one morning fastening up my boots with bits of wire, not having the necessary capital to invest in a pair of laces," I replied.

The painter laughed.

"We have all eaten our share of mad cow, as they say in Paris," he returned. "Did I ever tell you of my little experience with certain neighbours once upon a time?"

"Never. Go ahead!"

"I can't make much of it, but I can give the facts. If you can fix it up into anything you're welcome to do so—story-telling is your business. Maybe my tale is a shade gruesome, and sometimes as I look back at it I think perhaps my action wasn't strictly honest, though I fancy it will pass muster in this world of sin. You see, it was this way:

"Bob Allan—he's in Florence now—read about his new picture the other day, didn't you?—Bob Allan and I were born in the same little Irish town. We both decided to be celebrated artists, so we went to Dublin to begin. Don't ever boast to me about your early poverty; we were poverty itself, personified, and stalking about like a pestilence. You may have wired up your shoes, but we didn't have any shoes to wire. At least, we had only a single pair between us, and when one went out the other had to stay in. In addition to that, they were too small for me and too big for Bob.

"Well, we found a place at the top of an old building which we thought would do for a studio. It was a big room, and we got it practically free because the owner couldn't rent it to anybody else. The building had been intended for business, not residential purposes, and our room had once been a printing office. The floor was deep in ink, grease, and general dirt; and the walls weren't much better. The printers had moved away because the building had got to be unsafe for their presses.

"We bought a second-hand bed, begged a chair, borrowed an oil-stove, and stole a soap box, and—there we were! Sometimes we had two meals, sometimes only one, but we kept at work."

"You had got along far enough in your art studies that you had work, then?" I observed.

"My dear boy, signs! Such work as that. And we weren't successful at them, either, because the regular sign painters could do better work. It was unsatisfactory business.

"We got on through the autumn pretty well, but when cold weather came, our quarters became rather cheerless. The windows were loose, the shutters banged, the skylight let in the snow, and the wind puffed up through the cracks and rat-holes in the floor. The rat-holes, by-the-way, were a great source of annoyance to us. I shall never forget how proud I was the day I bought a toothbrush. The very next morning Bob lost it down a rat-hole.

"What made it harder for us was the fact that there were a lot of fellows about our own age in the immediate neighbourhood who seemed to be enjoying all the luxuries of life. Right across the corridor from our door was another leading apparently into some suite of rooms where, strange to say, in the glimpses we caught of the interior, we saw heavy rugs on the floor, upholstered furniture, a well-stocked sideboard and all that sort of thing. We took it to be some peculiar club. The members didn't seem to come very much in the daytime, but used generally to drop in at about eight o'clock in the evening, and from then till midnight, or after, sounds of good cheer, not to say of conviviality, greeted our ears. We usually went to bed early to get warm, and left the wind which came up the rat-holes to fight it out with the snow which came down the skylight.

"Matters kept getting worse with us. We had great hopes of selling one of Bob's landscapes, but while he was carrying it to the probable purchaser, he got knocked down by a runaway horse and trap, and the picture was ruined.

"It was the day of the funeral of Paddy Laughlin, a famous policeman, and the horse had become frightened by the waving plumes on the hearse. We knew Paddy well enough.

"It was about two weeks after this that Bob and I were coming in together—having got another pair of shoes somehow—pretty well discouraged. It was near five o'clock in the afternoon, and the prospect for supper was about as poor as it could be. I had the key in my hand as we walked down the corridor. When we reached our door, on a sudden mad impulse, I inserted it in the door opposite. To my surprise the key turned and the door swung open. There was no one in sight so we stepped in.

"We found ourselves in a good-sized square room, furnished with a dozen easy chairs, three or four couches, a sideboard and a piano. There were rugs on the floor and pictures on the walls. In a small room on one side was a small safe containing chops, steaks, and other food, and in boxes was a lot of coal.

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Beyond was a door leading into still another room. We were surprised to find this empty with the exception of a table and a long, queer box standing on carpenters' saw stools. The floor and walls were bare, and the only other article of furniture was a wash-stand.

"I walked over, raised the cover of the queer box and looked in. Then I put it down, rather hastily I think. Bob started to follow my example.

"'Old man,' I said, 'I don't think you want to look in there.'

"'What's the reason I don't,' inquired Bob.

"'Oh, nothing much; but you don't. Just take my word for it.'

"'I wouldn't take your word for anything' said Bob; and with that he lifted the cover and looked in. He put it down without any great delay. Then he turned to me and said:

"'Paddy Laughlin.'

"I nodded. 'Medical students,' I added.

"'Yes,' returned Bob, edging towards the door. 'There was a mystery about the complaint which caused his death, you remember. They are trying to clear it up.'

"'Yes.' An idea had struck me, and I was doing some hard thinking. We passed out into the other room.

"'Come on,' said Bob, pulling open the door leading into the corridor.

"'No hurry,' I replied carelessly. 'Just unlock our door and leave it open.'

"'What are you going to do?'

"'Nothing much. Just take hold and help move these things over into our place.'

"'What do you mean?'

"'We need the stuff more than they do.'

"'What are you driving at? We'll be arrested.'

"'Hardly. There isn't time to answer your questions now. Come, the chairs first,' and I hurried one of them across the passage.

"Bob saw that there was nothing else to do, so he took hold with a will, and in ten minutes we had the chairs and couches transferred. Then we rolled up the rugs and snatched down the pictures. The sideboard and meat safe were larger orders, but we made them ours at last, with their entire contents; and the piano followed. We even took the table and wash-stand in the unfurnished room. Then we tackled the coal. This was pretty hard work, but with a scuttle and a big market basket we finally got the last lumps of it shifted. Then we closed and locked the door and went to work arranging the things in our own room, first astonishing our cold and forbidding grate with a fire. Things fitted nicely, and in half-an-hour they seemed quite at home in their new quarters. We were by this time famished, so we broiled a steak, opened a bottle of claret and proceeded to nourish ourselves. Then we each ignited a good cigar and lay back in two of the biggest chairs before the fire, while I explained to Bob my plan of future operations.

"The clock on the mantel, also part of the plunder, had just struck eight, and our cigars were about half finished when we heard a quick, active step coming along the passage. There was a pause at the door and the sound of the key in the lock, one or two doubtful steps on the bare floor within, and the striking of a match. A long silence followed.

"'He takes it hard,' I observed to Bob.

"'Rather odd that he should,' returned Bob, helping himself to another glass of wine.

"We could soon hear him wandering about from room to room and scratching matches as he lit successive gas jets, apparently that more light might reveal the missing furniture. We started fresh cigars, and Bob helped himself to another glass of wine.

"In about five minutes we heard other footsteps coming. There proved to be two of the newcomers, and as they stepped into the room they stopped suddenly, and there was total silence for about thirty seconds.

"We puffed noiselessly at our cigars, and Bob blew some smoke rings. Then we heard some conversation across the hall, not loud but deep. Other members arrived in rapid succession, till we estimated that some twenty or twenty-five must be there. It seemed as if they would wear out the floors stamping about, and by this time the talk had grown into a loud and angry Babel of voices. Still a certain pair of young men who had resolved to be great artists smoked on and settled back at a more comfortable angle.

"Suddenly the uproar ceased, and there was a long whispered consultation. Then there came a loud rap at our door.

"'Come in!' I responded.

"The door opened, and a big football player of a fellow strode in, followed by the whole crowd. For a moment they stood aghast. We folded our hands and smoked on. When the leader in a voice like a bull said:

"'Look here, you infernal tramps, what do you mean by coming into our place and looting it?'

"'Let's get at 'em!' 'Throw 'em out of the window!' 'Smash 'em!' came from his followers in angry chorus.

"'Do I understand you to say that we have got some of your things?' I inquired sweetly.

"'Some! You miserable thieves, you've got everything!'

"'Everything?'

"'Yes!'

"'Are you sure?'

"'Sure? Now you try once more to be funny, and I'll take you up and pound the floor with you!'

"'You say we have taken everything, eh?'

"'I do.'

"'You are mistaken. There is one thing which we didn't take.'

"'Eh?'

"'We left you one thing.'

"He looked at us. He knew the penalty for keeping that one thing. We smoked on. He turned to his companions and observed that their jaws had dropped. Then he looked back at us and said:

"'Come to think of it, that's the most important thing after all. We don't care for this stuff, do we, fellows? Just keep it. Sorry we have disturbed you. Good night!' and they all filed out like lambs.

"Bob uncorked another bottle, and we drank to the memory of Paddy Laughlin.

"The next day the medical students subscribed amongst themselves and refurnished their rooms. Come on, here we are at the theatre!"

"You say it has occurred to you since, that it was a bit like stealing?" I observed.

"Vaguely—yes. Though when we came to London in the spring we left the things behind. All we wanted was to be comfortable during the winter. I tell you, old man, it was a relief to get some rugs over those rat-holes!"

H. T. P.

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THE INVISIBLE PLAYER.

I could not resist lifting my eyes, with a twinkle of amused triumph in them, to Jack Belknap's face, as I gathered in the last trick and swept the cards together in a heap.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Jack, pushing his chair back, with a scowl on his handsome face; "that's the fifth game in succession you've beaten me, and you're the only man who ever did it, too. I don't understand it. But I'll whitewash you before long, you mark my words!" He rose, lit a cigar, and walked moodily out of the club.

Cards were Jack Belknap's passion—his weakness; the dear fellow had no other fault. Well might he be pardoned for loving a good game of skill—not of chance—with the mysterious pasteboards, and if it cut him to the heart to be beaten—well, what devotee of any honest sport cannot sympathise with him?

Although Jack is one of my best friends, I could not help feeling that he was desperately vexed with me when he went out of the club that night, smoking the only cigar I had seen him put to his lips for months. I ought not to have looked up with that mischievously exultant, self-congratulatory glance, I suppose. My triumph ought to have been accepted in the meekest, most carelessly undemonstrative manner. But then—Jack was such a famous card-player!

However, my friend was only vexed, and I knew his indignation, if he really felt any towards me, would soon wear off. So I went unconcernedly to the reading-room and sat down to read the papers until eight o'clock, when I was to take a train to Dover on business which would require my presence there early the next morning.

At a quarter past eight I hailed a cab, and was driven to the station. My train, an express, took less than two hours to do the run, and by half past ten I found myself in a cosy room at the M—— hotel, not a bit sleepy, and wishing that I had brought a good book to amuse myself until my customary bedtime, eleven o'clock.

I searched the room to see if there were not some discarded novel that I might dip into for an hour. But although I did not find what I was looking for, on opening one of the table drawers I was pleased and amused to discover a soiled pack of cards. Smiling to myself I drew them forth, counted them, and flung them down on the little toilet table.

"Now, Master Jack Belknap," I said, addressing my friend as an imaginary adversary, "if you aren't satisfied, we will sit down at this little table and play that series over again. I think that, if I play for you as well as myself, you will stand some chance of winning at least one of the games."

To complete the playful deception I placed a chair at the opposite side of the table, and dealt an equal number of cards to its imaginary occupant and myself.

"Now, Jack," said I, "if you will kindly excuse me, I will examine your hand first, and see what chance you have of doing something in this game."

Reaching over, I was about to gather up the cards of my imaginary opponent, when, to my utter amazement and terror, the little heap of pasteboards went up, precisely as if some invisible hand had grasped them; then, with deft rapidity, they were assorted in suits before my staring eyes!

For a moment, the chill of terror that had coursed down my spinal column when the cards were first lifted from the table fairly froze me to my chair, and I sat as one paralysed; then came an impulse to cry out, to flee from the room. I was on the point of making a dash for the door, when a card came jauntily and carelessly flying into the middle of the table. It was the invisible player's first move!

Then a new mood seized me. I felt a sudden, thrilling bravado, like that of a man who fancies there is a

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burglar in the house, and, lamp and revolver in hand, strides out to the passage, all pricking in his nerves, and walking as if on air. I would accept the invisible player's challenge, and fight out the game with him! It would be the experience of a lifetime, at any rate—a game of cards with a spirit!

Trembling with suppressed excitement and fear, yet with a firm grip on my nerves and with teeth clenched together like those of a man going into some fierce contest of strength or skill, I fixed my attention upon my unseen adversary's card and flung one from the same suit beside it.

Would the mysterious creature or power respond? I held my breath in expectancy. Yes; after a moment's pause, like the hesitation of a careful player, another card was detached from the hovering sheaf and cast upon the table. It was a good move, an intelligent move, as I perceived even in my excitement. There was surely a brain at the back of that invisible action. Unlike spiritual manifestations, there was nothing incoherent or disconnected about the "communication" this being had to make to me.

I gathered myself together and entered into the strange contest with all my mental powers alert. I determined that I would not think of the mystery confronting me—I would only think of the game and how I should play to win it. I bent my eyes upon the table and refrained from looking at the fan-shaped sheaf of cards suspended opposite.

Play followed play in rapid and determined succession. The game grew fascinating, absorbing. Hands were exhausted, tricks gathered, cards collected, shuffled, and dealt; and in all of these operations the invisible player did his part as promptly and as cleverly as I did mine. One—two—three games went to the ghost in relentless succession. I began to get vexed. Seldom had anybody taken three games from me in that fashion. I was determined it should not be four—but it was! Well, we would play the series out! I would win one out of the five. I glanced at my watch. It was one o'clock.

Grasping the scattered cards, I shuffled and dealt them again. The game began. It was the closest of all. Once the invisible player paused for a full half minute, after a play of mine had been made, and I studied his moves with equal care. At length, by a wonderfully brilliant and masterly play, after leading me upon an entirely false scent, my invisible adversary won!

I pushed back with an exclamation of anger, and in so doing overturned the little toilet table. It came to the floor with a bang, and the cards were scattered far and wide over the floor.

Getting down on my hands and knees, I gathered them up, and counted them. The pack was complete.

Then I righted the table, and replaced the cards upon it, saying: "Whoever you are, I challenge you to another series, the stakes to be as you please!"

There was no response. I dealt the cards. For five minutes I waited, watching the little heap of pasteboards opposite me. Then I rose, gathered up the cards, put them in the drawer where I had found them, and went to bed.

* * * * *

The next evening, having completed my business, I was back at my club again. Jack Belknap met me smilingly.

"Come, old boy," he said, "let's have another evening of euchre. I know I can beat you this time! I dreamt that I did it last night, and what's more, I dreamt just how I did it!"

"The deuce you did!" I exclaimed in amazement. "Well, come and show me how!"

Jack won the series in precisely the same manner, and exactly the same time as the invisible player who had vanquished me the night before. Then I told my experience to Jack. His cheeks glowed, and his eyes shone as he listened.

"Do you believe in the influence of the subjective mind over matter?" he asked.

"What nonsense is that you are talking?" I cried.

"I see you know nothing about it," he said, fingering his watch-chain thoughtfully. "But I have new faith in that wonderful theory. Whiteford, I was the invisible player!"

HORACE MANNS.

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Every week we shall give away half-a-dozen books.

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Send these to us in one envelope together with a request for any single book in the whole world of literature.

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Please let me have: **S. S.**

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Price.....

Name.....

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.....

Result of the "Book" Competition for the Week Ending March 5th.

F. Roberts, 8 Cricketfield Road, Clapton, N.E. "Lieder ohne Wörte," Mendelssohn. 7s. 6d.

Miss Mabel M. Forse, Englefield Green, Surrey. "We Two," by Edna Lyall. 6s.

W. F. Campton, 49 Upper Townsend Street, Belfast. "Trilby," by Geo. du Maurier. 6s.

Miss Mary Compton, 9' Sanson Road, Leytonstone. "Thelma," by Marie Corelli. 6s.

A. R. Ward, 13 Maria Street, Neath. Spon's "Mechanic's Own Book." 6s.

W. Hunt, 127 Edgware Road, W. "Exercise for Health," by H. H. Hulbert and Luis J. Phelan. 3s. 6d.

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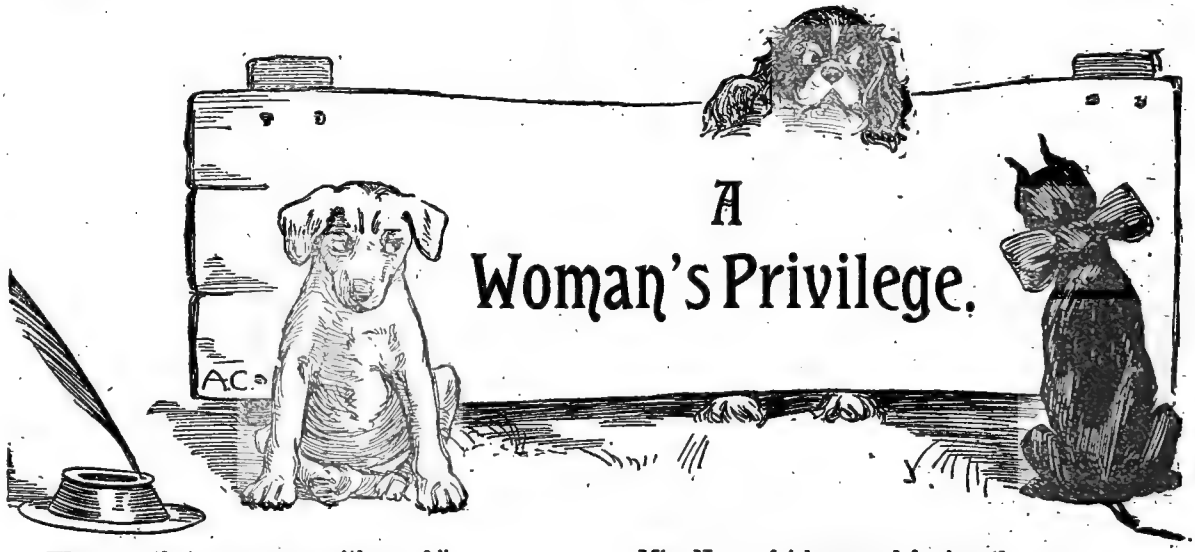

A Woman's Privilege.

"Who was that young man with you?"

Miss Nancy Armstrong asked the question of her niece Margery. Her tone was sharp, and her eyes had an angry look in them.

"It was John Markham," answered Margery quietly enough, as she took off her hat; but the tone in which the question had been asked brought additional colour to her cheeks and a sparkle of resentment to her eyes.

"I thought so," responded Miss Nancy, in her most irritating way. "Margery Armstrong, I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself."

"What for?" asked Margery. "I'm not aware that I've done anything to be ashamed of."

"Oh, you needn't try to plead innocence," retorted Miss Nancy. "You ought to be ashamed of going with that Markham fellow, and you know it."

"I don't know any such thing," answered Margery, facing her aunt bravely. "John Markham is a respectable young man. You don't like him because there used to be trouble between the Markhams and the Armstrongs. That happened before either of us was born, and there's no reason why we should keep up the quarrel. If we see fit to like each other, I don't know who's going to prevent our doing so."

"I am," answered Miss Nancy grimly. "You needn't think—and John Markham needn't think—that a penny of my property will go into the hands of any one of that family!"

"You can do just as you see fit about your property, of course," said Margery. "I haven't anything to say about that, but if you think anything you can do will prevent John and me from liking each other, you're quite mistaken. He doesn't want your property, but"—with the prettiest little blush imaginable, and a softening of the voice at the import of the words—"He does want me."

"Margery Armstrong! I should like to know how far the matter has gone," cried Miss Nancy, in wrathful surprise. "To judge by the way you talk, one would suppose it is all settled between you!"

"It is," answered Margery, with eyes that never flinched before the angry ones of her aunt. "I promised John to-night, coming home from church, that I'd marry him as soon as he has a home for me."

Miss Nancy fairly gasped for breath.

"You're a silly," she said, as soon as she could command her voice, "to take up with that fellow when you might marry the squire's nephew!"

"I wouldn't marry the squire's nephew if he was the last man on earth," said Margery. "Compare him with John Markham, and I know that down in your heart you can't help owning that he is an insignificant apology for a man.

"All you can see to admire in him is his money, I'm sure, and if he had a thousand times more than he has, I'd have just as much contempt for him as I have now."

"You may see the day when you'll wish you had some of his money," said Miss Nancy. "Wait till you're John Markham's wife and poor as poverty, and things will look different. Of course, he thinks, and you think too, that I shall change my mind when I find out that I can't prevent your marrying him. But you were never more mistaken in your life. Marry that fellow and I'll see that not a penny of mine goes to you."

"Please yourself about that," answered Margery. "We don't want your money. We're both strong and willing to work, and we'll get along. Don't worry about that."

"That sounds well, but you will sing a different tune by-and-bye," said Miss Nancy. "Just remember what I say."

Margery went up to her room, not to think about what her aunt said, but about the things she had talked of with her lover as they walked home from church together.

One day Miss Nancy decided to go to town to do some shopping. She was always afraid of being too late for the train, and generally arrived at the station long before it was due. She did so on this occasion, and as the day was a very warm one, she sat down on the platform in the shade of some large boxes that had been unloaded there, thinking it more comfortable there than in the stuffy little waiting room.

Very soon she heard steps on the platform, and presently voices from the other side of the pile of boxes reached her ears.

"How is your matrimonial project getting on?" was asked by one of the unseen parties.

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A voice which Miss Nancy recognised as belonging to the squire's nephew answered:

"It seems to hang fire just at present. The fact is, the girl's got another string to her bow, and the chances would be against me if it wasn't for the fact that her aunt favours my suit, because she thinks I shall get uncle's money, and she would like to unite the two properties. So I'm rather sweeter on the aunt at present than I am on the girl. If I get the girl at all it must be through the old lady's influence, you see.

"The girl's a little daisy, but the aunt—well, she isn't a daisy, you can be sure of that! It's a question if having her in the family wouldn't be paying a dear price for all her property, but, you see, there's a chance of being able to shake her off after a little.

"I happen to know that a new railway line is going through this place, and the company will have to buy a piece of land she owns, and this land she intends to give to the girl as a wedding present. Now as soon as the line is put through—and it's sure to come—this land will be worth more than all the rest of the old lady's property. If the girl gets a deed of it, and I get the girl, I can sell it to the railway company and make a good big sum of money out of it, and we shall be independent of the aunt, and when that happens, if it ever does, I'll tell her to look out for her own affairs and I'll look out for mine. I am taking care that she does not find out about the new railway scheme. I want to make sure of the girl and the land before I break the news to her."

Miss Nancy listened with ears and eyes very wide open.

"Yes, when it happens, if it ever does," she chuckled. "I don't believe you will ever get the chance you are looking for, my smart young man! I don't suppose I am a daisy—I never thought I was!—but I rather fancy I'm a match for you, since I know what to do. I don't believe you will have to shake me off. I think I'll do a little—or most of the shaking."

Just then the train came along, and Miss Nancy got in without being seen by the young men.

As luck would have it, she met the squire's nephew at the station.

"If you're going home you might walk along with me and help to carry some of my parcels," she said, in a very pleasant manner. "I'm tired out. I've been seeing to a good deal of business to-day. I have had a deed made out, giving Margery the south forty acres of the farm, and I've been pricing carpets and furniture and finding out how much it's going to cost to set up a young couple in housekeeping. Of course, they won't need the things just yet, but I thought I would get some idea of what the expense would be!"

"They—who do you mean?" asked the young man in bewilderment.

"Why, Margery and Mr. Markham, of course," answered Miss Nancy. "Who else should I mean?"

"You don't mean to say that you intend to let your niece marry that fellow!" cried the squire's nephew in surprise and consternation.

"Why, certainly," replied Miss Nancy, as if she had never had any other idea. "He is a nice young man. He's got brains, and when he gets Margery he will get money, for the new railway will make the land I've given to her worth a snug little fortune."

"I'd like to know how you heard about the new railway," cried the astonished young man.

"Oh, I keep myself posted on such matters," said Miss Nancy, looking very wise. "But here we are at my gate. Thank you for carrying my parcels. Won't you come in?"

"No, not to-night," was the gruff reply, and Miss Nancy chuckled as the young man went his way.

"I think I've got even with you," she said, nodding her head after his retreating figure. "I expect he was about as much surprised as Margery will be."

Her niece had seen her, and came out to meet her and help her with her parcels.

"Margery, I've got something to tell you," said Miss Nancy, anxious to have the matter disposed of. "I've thought it all over, and I don't know but you are right about John Markham. It is foolish to let an old grudge stand in the way of young folks' happiness. So I have changed my mind—that's a woman's privilege, you know—and I have concluded to let you do as you think best. I've had the south forty made over to you by deed. And when John gets you he will get that too, if you see fit to turn it over to him. It's yours to do just as you please with."

"Why, Aunt Nancy!" cried Margery, looking at her as if she felt sure she had gone crazy. "I thought you would never consent to our marraige!"

"Folks change their minds sometimes," said Miss Nancy. "There! there! Don't hug me so or I shall drop this parcel. I hear a whistle down the road that sounds like John's. You'd better go and tell him the news, and by-and-bye, after I've had a cup of tea, bring him in to see me."

KATE ROGERS.

W. T. STEAD INTERVIEWED.

The Greatest Living Journalist Speaks to the

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THE RIVAL QUEENS.

A TALE OF OLD FRANCE RETOLD FROM THE FRENCH BY MARY FERMOR

SUMMARY.

Amaury Montruel, a knight, and Mahmoud-el-Reis, a Saracen, meet on the road to Paris. The former's mission is to kill the Queen of France; the latter's to kill the King. At the same time two children, Eric and Eve, are on their way to Paris to aid the Queen, and overhear the conversation of these two horsemen. Shortly afterwards a knight and his page give the children a lift on the road, and, on arriving at Paris, place them under the care of the Freemasons. Maître Samson, Montruel's secretary, tries to induce Tristan de Pamiers, king of the law students, to raise a rebellion in favour of Agnes de Méranie against Philip's consort, Queen Ingeburge. Albret, the King's page, takes Eve, *alias* Little Adam, to the King, and on the way confesses his love for her.

CHAPTER V.

The Captive Queen.

In the large, straggling garden which surrounded the Abbey St. Martin—with its smooth lawns, lofty trees, and countless flowering shrubs, with its quaintly-cut hedges and brilliant *parterre*—walked a woman, still young and beautiful, with a sweet, sad face, and slow step, followed at some few paces by two dark-robed, stern-featured nuns.

They had just emerged from the shade of the cloister, and were descending the moss-covered steps that led to an unfrequented part of the grounds, and while the veiled nuns walked with the unbending rigidity required by their order, their young companion seemed to gain fresh life and vigour from the sweet-scented evening air.

She might have been a few years older than Eve. Her beauty, though developed, had lost none of its freshness, and in spite of a certain resemblance between the two, this fair, pensive recluse had a Royal dignity of bearing wholly wanting in the simple grace of the younger girl.

Here in the shade of the ancient Abbey, with no sounds to break the stillness but the chanting of the monks and the sweet singing of the birds, Ingeburge of Denmark, the lawful wife of Philip Augustus, and the rightful Queen-Consort of France, was wearing out her young life in a hopeless sorrow—smitten by the hand of him she had already learnt to love so well, and spurned by the husband who had sworn to cherish her.

As she wandered on, her spirits revived somewhat; she smiled to herself, and drew in her breath as if even there it was good to be alive on that sunny evening, and at last her steps quickened into a run when she reached the soft, dewy grass.

The nuns coughed ominously, and Ingeburge checked her pace, remembering she was at once Queen and captive. Still the voice of awakening Nature brought a sense of comfort, almost a promise of better things.

Suddenly, she darted forward, giving a cry of joy, and as she ran, her long fair hair became loosened, and fell over her white dress far below her waist. The horrified nuns followed as best they might, exclaiming:

"Madame! Madame!" in tones of bitter remonstrance.

They found her kneeling on the grass, with a bunch of tiny blue flowers in her hand.

"See!" she said, with tears in her deep blue eyes, "see, my sisters! You must pardon me, but I could not help it when I saw that my 'vennen' were in flower."

"And what does that signify?" began one drily.

"What? do you ask me that? Do you not know that these are the first flowers that bloom on the Castle terrace

Followed at some paces by two dark-robed, stern-faced nuns.

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at home, in Copenhagen? It is the flower of remembrance, the flower of my native land! Ah, my poor blossoms," she murmured, pressing them to her lips, "you look frail and you hang your heads, for you are in exile, like me! France has not been kind to either of us!"

Half-an-hour later the Queen was sitting on a stone bench, talking to the aged Prior Anselm, a man of venerable appearance and kindly manner, while the two nuns waited at a respectful distance. The priest had just received her confession, and was now trying to console her with words of hope and comfort.

"Is there anything that I can do to lessen your sufferings, my daughter? Tell me, and I will do it if it lies in my power."

The Queen coloured slightly.

"They tell me that in a distant part of the Abbey you have a hospital for sick men, is it so?"

"Yes, they have told you rightly, my daughter."

"Then grant me your promise, father, and let me spend part of my useless life in helping to nurse the poor sufferers. I should not then waste my time in vain regrets."

"You, the Queen!"

"If I were the Queen in very deed, I should have power to help those who are in want and distress, but here I can do nothing but tend them with my own hands."

"But, my daughter, there are often contagious diseases among our sick folk."

"And if I died thus, should I not have cause to bless France, which, though denying me an earthly crown, gave me that of the Holy Saints?"

The prior looked at her with admiring reverence, and said, as he raised her hand to his lips:

"You shall have your will, my daughter, you shall tend our sick; but if Heaven hears my poor prayers, your brow shall wear the Crown of France before it is encircled by that of the Saints."

"Is there nothing else you desire?"

"Oh, yes," she replied quickly, and began to tell him how she longed for some one to talk to unreservedly, a girl near her own age, who could share her feelings, and not frown at her like those cold, grave women, whose hearts had been crushed under the load of unnatural discipline.

"The King's orders are absolute, my daughter. He would not allow it," said the old man sadly.

At this moment there was an unwonted stir in the great cloister, which was hidden from the prior and Ingeburge by thick clumps of trees, but neither of them paid any attention to the sound.

She continued to plead that he would use his influence with the King, and he listened with a heavy heart, for he knew how unbending Philip was in all that concerned his neglected wife. At last she ceased, and as he laid his fatherly hand upon her head, with an unspoken prayer, her tears fell thick and fast.

The noise increased, footsteps and angry voices came nearer, and the prior listened in wonderment. Then a clear young voice was heard above the rest, calling:

"Angel, my sister Angel, where are you?"

Ingeburge awoke as from a hideous dream and listened, not daring to believe her ears.

"Am I going mad?" she murmured.

The voice, still repeating the same words, seemed to be going farther away, when Ingeburge pressed her trembling hands to her eyes for a moment and then, as if yielding to some irresistible impulse, she cried:

"Here, Eve, my sister Eve!"

There was a rustling of leaves, the branches were thrust aside and a young girl, dressed in white like the Queen, sprang out from the shade and clasped the latter in her arms.

Clasped the latter in her arms.

It was indeed little Eve, who had doffed her male attire and now stood laughing and crying in her speechless joy at the reunion with her beloved Princess.

The Queen looked long and lovingly at her, holding both her hands as if fearful of her disappearing as suddenly as she had come.

"My little Eve, my sister, how is it that I see you again, and *here*?"

"It has cost me much to reach you," said Eve at last, in their native tongue, "but I bless Heaven for it all, now that I am with you once more, my Queen and sister."

The two nuns now came forward and one laid her hand on Eve's arm, saying harshly:

"What does this woman want? We have strict orders that no one is to speak to the Princess of Denmark."

Before the prior could speak, Ingeburge drew herself up to her full height, and said with chilling dignity:

"To the Queen of France, you mean."

"My daughter," gently interposed Anselm, "you know the King's orders."

"But," said Eve, pulling out a parchment from her dress, "I am here by order of the King."

The nuns smiled incredulously, and even the old prior looked doubtful, as Eve handed him the letter, which Ingeburge seized in passing, and kissed the royal signature even though she ignored its import.

"The girl says truly," he said when he had read the parchment. "His Majesty has appointed her to be the the Queen's attendant."

The nuns withdrew crestfallen, and the hostile body of monks, lay brothers, and servants who had sought to oppose Eve's entrance rapidly disappeared at a sign from the prior.

Before he left them the old man laid his hand in blessing on Eve's young head.

"You have a tender, faithful heart, my child, and I pray God you may bring comfort to our dear Queen."

He kissed Ingeburge's hand and moved slowly away.

"Eve, my dear child, how can I ever thank you for this? It is the first gleam of happiness that has come to me since I entered these gloomy walls, and it is you who bring it to me! How you have grown! I left you a mere child, and now you are nearly a woman, and beautiful, too, my little sister," she added caressingly.

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"And you, Angel, are changed, you are pale and sad, but still my beautiful Princess! He must be blind not to love you!"

"He is my husband and my lord, and I love him, Eve, so speak of him as if he loved me, for my sake."

"And who dare say he does not love you? The gipsy Agnes has bewitched him, all Paris knows that, but the King said to me to-day: 'Queen Ingeburge is holy—Queen Ingeburge is beautiful!'"

"The King said that of the wife he has shut up here? Oh, Eve, do not cheer me with false words!" she said, trying to withdraw her hand from Eve's close clasp.

"I have so much to tell you, Angel, that I hardly know where to begin, but, believe me, that even to save *you* my lips could not utter a lie."

The Queen and her peasant foster-sister sat down on the old stone bench, and the latter related all that happened in the old home and on the long journey, up to that morning's ride with Albret. The Queen listened with deep interest and emotion, but the naïve recital of Eve's talk with the page brought a smile to the sad face and a word of warning to her lips, which, however, fell unheeded, as most such words do. The girl told how she had been taken to the Louvre and had recognised their benefactor, the knight "Dieudonné," in the powerful King of France.

"He was alone in the vast room, unarmed and bare-headed, walking up and down in deep thought. In my confusion I looked round for Albret, but he was not to be seen, so I was alone with the great Philip Augustus. For a minute or two he took no notice of me, then he stopped and signed to me to come nearer. My knees shook, but I managed to go down on them before him. He looked vexed and said:

"'Did Albret tell you anything?'

"I swore to him that nothing but my own instinct had told me his high rank, just as one realises the presence of God in church."

"Eve, Eve, that was almost blasphemy!"

"The King did not seem to think so, for he smiled, and I wanted to please him for your sake, Queen Angel, so I knelt on, forgetting my boy's dress, till he called me 'Maître Adam,' and then I started and got so red that he laughed outright and said:

"'I see you don't know how to tell lies yet!' I was trying to find an answer, when he added kindly: 'Come, child, it is no use trying to deceive me. The King knows *all*.' I felt so ashamed, for I had known him as a friend in trouble before I knew him as a king, and so I should have trusted him, for I had still his purse of gold in my vest. 'My daughter,' he went on gently, 'I guessed your secret the moment I saw you in your brother's arms, where you come from, what you have come for, and even that they say your brother carries a dagger for my breast, as well as his trowel; but, child, I do not heed such tales—one dagger more or less matters little to me.' He said this all so calmly; there was no boast in it, only courage. Surely his heart can know no fear!"

"Yes," cried Ingeburge gratefully, "there is no knight so brave as my lord!"

"Then he asked me: 'Should you be very happy if I told you to go and see this Princess Ingeburge, whom you love so dearly?'

"I told him how I had travelled on foot through all those weary months in the hope of obtaining such a boon, and when he asked if I were of noble birth I told him I was only fit to be a queen's waiting-maid."

"Ah," said Ingeburge reproachfully, "even you did not dare to say *the* queen."

"No, my sister, I dare not thwart the King when I wanted such a favour from him, so he smiled, and patting my cheek said, in a joking way: 'Well then, Maître Adam, you shall be your Queen's page and begin your duties to-day.' I forgot all fear and even proper respect, for I seized the King's hand and kissed it again and again. He did not seem at all offended, but went on to say: 'I see you are a good girl, and you do well to love that saintly and beautiful woman, who bears her unmerited sufferings with so much resignation.'"

Eve paused, for she saw that her last words had caused her companion's tears to flow, but they were tears of gratitude, not bitterness, so she continued:

"As I was leaving the room the King said: 'Your brother has nothing to fear from me. I am not suspicious of those who love Queen Ingeburge. And, as there are always evil tongues ready to talk, remember that if anyone tells Ingeburg of Denmark that I believe she has hired the Syrian assassin, tell her, from me, that I know it for a base lie.'"

This was the first whisper that had reached Ingeburge of her lord's danger, and all else became as nothing at the thought of it. She questioned Eve eagerly as to his guards and friends. Were they faithful and to be trusted? Eve thought of that "friend" she had heard bartering life for life on the road to Paris, and Montruel's words seemed to ring in her ears with fateful sound.

"Did the King say ought else?" inquired the Queen at last.

"The King?" said Eve starting out of her painful reverie. "Yes; he told me to announce to you that you would receive a visit from him to-night before sunset."

"Child, child, why did you not tell me that before anything? To think that I am to see him, my lord, my husband, this very night! I have never seen him since we were parted at the altar steps! But I must be ready for him. Come and help me, we will bind garlands of these blue flowers in my hair, for I must please Philip, my King."

The Queen's eyes were shining with loving anticipation, her face was flushed and her whole being instinct with life and longing; but Eve's eyes were dimmed with unshed tears, and her heart was heavy with a dark foreboding. There was one thing she had not told.

Just as she made her last obeisance to the King, the form of a dark, beautiful woman had entered the room and in a hard, haughty voice had said to Philip:

"You shall not go!"

CHAPTER VI.

A Visit to Notre-Dame.

The sun had set, and Ingeburge waited with the blue flowers fading in her sunny hair, and hope still struggling to live in her heart, but the King never came.

An hour earlier, a brilliant cavalcade of knights and noble dames had ridden from the Louvre along the right bank of the Seine towards the city. Madame Agnes had conceived a sudden desire to see the Cathedral, and she was now going there with her suite, accompanied by the proudest barons of France, including the Duke of Burgundy himself, all transformed into obsequious courtiers by the iron will and ready wit of Philip Augustus.

On one side of Agnes de Méranie rode Amaury Montruel, magnificently dressed and splendidly mounted on a spirited Cordovan jonnet, which he managed with the perfect ease of an accomplished horseman.

Many a muttered curse followed them as the simple citizens saw this woman with her insolent beauty vaunt her ill-gotten splendour before the world, and there were those who whispered that the King was deceived both in the woman he had made his wife and the man he called his friend.

On her other side rode Herbert Melfast, Lord of Pevensey, whose jewels might have vied with those of the richest shrine; and, far behind in the crowd, was seen the tall form of Tristan de Pamiers bestriding an ancient war horse, in company with Maître Samson, whose shambling steed possessed ears long enough to point to a somewhat ignoble ancestry.

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As they turned on to the great bridge, Amaury bent down and whispered to Agnes, pointing to a tall man with a mason's hammer on his shoulder:

"A smile for him, madame, if you please, he is the Master of the Freemasons, and his men follow him like sheep."

Madame Agnes smiled sweetly to order, and graciously waved her hand to the man in question. Maitre Honore blushed like a girl, and lifting his hammer above his head, raised a cheer for Queen Agnes!

"Thus easily do you gain all hearts!" sighed Montruel languishingly, but Agnes paid no attention to him. She knew he was her slave, and that she need waste no smiles to keep him in her toils, so she directed her blandishments to the apparently stolid Melfast, whom Montruel had advised her to captivate; but she went to work with such eagerness that it was not long before he regretted his disinterested counsel.

By a dexterous manœuvre Tristan now managed to bring himself into prominence, and as Montruel caught sight of him, he said:

"Another smile, madame, for that is the mighty King of the Basoche!"

She cast a quick, contemptuous glance at the pale, shabby youth, but her face was wreathed in smiles, and her dark eyes shot captivating gleams as she passed him a second later.

Tristan rose in his stirrups, waved his cap in the air, and made the air ring with his lusty cheers. The cry was taken up on all sides by masons and students alike, and Madame Agnes, flushed with victory, continued her triumphal progress, smiling as directed, and winning favour with every smile. She was too clever a woman to attach one iota more value to this cheap enthusiasm than it deserved, but it was only a means to an end. She was out on business, not pleasure, that fine spring evening. Her instinct had told her that during the last eight-and-forty hours an indefinable and, to her, dangerous change had come over Philip Augustus. She knew that, however strong her fascinations were, they would never entirely subjugate him, for his head was stronger than his heart, and his will stronger than his passions.

Agnes de Méranie was haunted by the thought of her rival, the rightful Queen, who rose before her mental vision day and night as an avenging angel, till she had sworn that Ingeburge should no longer live to torment her. The object of these smiles and some judiciously-distributed crowns, supplied by Montruel, was to range the mob on her side, so that they might with more vehemence denounce her unfortunate rival. Every cheer was a fresh blow aimed at poor Ingeburge, who was even now waiting for her faithless lord.

As the party neared the precincts of Nôtre-Dame the crowd became denser, as it was the workmen's supper-hour, and the usual horde of beggars increased at this time of day. All eyes were turned on the brilliant train, and jeers and jibes were soon heard directed against her, who, in their eyes, was no more than the King's favourite courtesan.

"She has stolen the King's money for herself and her gipsy kinsfolk!" shouted one.

"Jewess! Gipsy! Arab witch!" sounded on all sides.

"She has shut up our poor young Queen in a dungeon!"

"In a black dungeon guarded by priests!"

"What is the use of building churches, when we have to live and die like heathens because of that sorceress!"

Between these imprecations were heard cries of "Cheers for Queen Agnes!" but they were soon lost in the growing buzz of discontent, till Agnes herself turned pale and Montruel looked round in search of a way of escape. Their situation was getting desperate. They were separated from the rest of the company by the excited crowd, who were closing in upon them with threatening gestures and angry looks. Smiles and blandishments were of no use here. These men were terribly in earnest.

On one side of Agnes de Méranie rode Amaury Montruel.

Our friends Ezekiel and Tréfouilloux were among the most vociferous, and their sense of the unequal division of wealth in this life lent additional ardour to their moral protests.

Tréfouilloux suggested ducking Agnes in the river, and Ezekiel, catching up the idea, shouted with all his might:

"To the river with the hussey!"

"To the river! To the river!" yelled the mob.

"Madame!" gasped Montruel, "you are a prisoner here, you must pay ransom."

"Then empty your purse, my lord," she said tartly.

He had not expected this, but he obeyed, nevertheless, and the crowd fought for a few minutes over the contents of his purse. As usual, our two deserving sufferers were unfortunate, so Ezekiel pressed forward and shouted:

"A diamond, Agnes! Give me one of your diamonds!"

This was again taken up clamorously, and it seemed as if they would drag the woman from her saddle.

"In the name of Heaven, madame, do not refuse them, there is not a moment to be lost," urged Montruel.

Contrary to all his expectations, she showed no unwillingness, but proceeded to divest herself of every ornament she was wearing, and throwing them among the seething mass, said graciously:

"Take them all, my friends, I brought them for you."

But Amaury Montruel got nothing.

This unexpected largesse naturally caused a hand to hand fight among the crowd, and while this was going on Agnes and Amaury made their way to the Cathedral.

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"Ugh!" she said, shrugging her shoulders. "That would have cost me thirty thousand crowns if I had not had the happy thought to leave my real jewels at the Louvre."

"What?" he asked incredulously.

"Those dirty wretches are quarrelling over bits of glass and tinsel not worth half a scu!"

When they entered the cathedral they were met by the Bishop and his attendant clergy. Madame Agnes nodded unceremoniously to Maurice de Sully, for she had not been told that he was of any use to her, and, in fact, the good man paid little heed either to the King's matrimonial difficulties or the Papal interference. His whole mind and thoughts were absorbed in the building of Nôtre-Dame, whose growth he watched with reverent tenderness. Every completed arch was, to him, a prayer granted; every sculptured saint a pledge of divine approval.

"These are for Dilah, your beloved."

There was one person present, however, upon whom Agnes was told to smile, and that was his eminence the Bishop of Orvietto, who was deputed by His Holiness to inquire into the marriage question once more.

She advanced towards him with well-feigned humility, and bent to kiss his hand, saying as she did so:

"I have heard so much of your exalted virtues, my father, that I have come here expressly to crave a blessing from one of earth's greatest saints."

The Legate's heart swelled with pride, though he spoke with lowered eyes and deprecating voice:

"Alas, my daughter, I am but a poor sinner!"

"Kneel to him and the man is ours!" whispered Montruel.

She knelt, and his white hands were extended above her bowed head; but surely, bestower and recipient alike, had little to do with the blessing.

This little episode served to raise her spirits, and she went through the unfinished nave making pretty speeches to the Bishop, though she thought the whole place looked an ugly mass of dirt and confusion.

At last she turned to the priests and said:

"Most reverent fathers, may I not be permitted to see the foreign sculptor who is at work on the figure of Blessed Mary?"

No one replied at first, and there was an embarrassing pause.

Since the day when Jean Cador rode to the Cathedral in majestic silence on his beautiful horse, followed by two negro slaves bearing his tools, and neither vouchsafing look nor word to the enthusiastic crowd who welcomed him, no one had dared to enter his temporary workshop.

He had been conducted to it by two deacons on his arrival, and had then expressed a desire that his privacy might be respected. As the sound of mighty blows were heard from the mysterious shed, men and women crossed themselves, and prayed that no harm might come to their church and city from this dark-skinned stranger and his uncanny black slaves.

Even the Bishop hesitated to disobey Jean Cador, for if he should throw up the work, who could be found to complete what the greatest sculptor of the time had begun?

However, Madame Agnes would take no refusal, and soon the Legate joined his entreaties to hers, so that the Bishop had to yield.

He pointed out the narrow staircase that led up to the place where the shed had been fixed over the great door where the statue was to stand in future, but gravely asked them to excuse his accompanying them. Agnes could hardly conceal her delight at this last stroke of fortune, and with a special smile of recognition to the Legate she hurried off with Montruel.

Mahmoud-el-Reis was sitting on a low stool with folded arms and bowed head. His thoughts were very far away, and the blows that the two negroes were dealing out to the, block of marble that was to become his masterpiece, failed to disturb them. On the rough wooden partition was an exquisite chalk sketch of a lovely woman in whom, perhaps, the earthly element overshadowed the divine, and whose beauty was that of the East, unchastened by the power of the Cross. It was very beautiful, but it was not Christian art.

The name of Dilah was hovering on the Syrian's lips, and it was Dilah's image he had transferred to the wall beside him.

For some seconds the two intruders stood unnoticed on the threshold, and Agnes looked admiringly at his picturesque form.

"His arms are strong," she said. "And has he promised?"

"He has promised."

"How are you going to pay him for it?"

"That is my secret," said Amaury, changing colour.

"But how will he get into the Abbey?"

"That is his secret."

"He neither sees nor hears us. But what is the name he keeps muttering?"

"The name of Dilah, whom he loves."

"Well, wake up your fine son of the desert; I have kept something from that rabble for him."

"Mahmoud!" said Montruel aloud.

The Syrian turned his head slowly, and let his eyes rest upon the two for a few seconds in silence, and the negroes ceased their work at the sound of a voice. Then he spoke:

"What do you want, and why do you bring that woman here?"

"She is the wife of the King of France," replied Montruel.

"The Queen?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, the Queen," put in Agnes in a firm voice.

The Moslem showed no sign of surprise, but rose quickly and whispered to Amaury:

"This is my house, and we never soil our dwellings. I will not kill this woman either at this time or in this place."

The possible consequences of this mistaken identity made Montruel feel sick at heart, so he answered hastily:

"This is not the one! I told you of Ingeburge of Denmark!"

"Ah, I understand! So this is her rival who has come to see if my eye is steady and my arm strong."

"Hush!" began Montruel, but Agnes interrupted him:

"I love the King, and this woman would steal his heart from me. You are right, Mahmoud-el-Reis, that is what I came here for!"

The Syrian turned from her with an air of revulsion, but her frankness pleased him better than duplicity would have done.

"So you love the King?" he asked with a strange intonation. With one of her most seductive smiles, she now drew out a string of pearls, and, extending her hand, said:

"These are for Dilah, your beloved."

His calmness seemed to forsake him for a moment, and

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there was almost an expression of fear in his eyes as he raised them to hers. His glance fell, and he held out his hand, into which she dropped the shining gems.

"I thank you," he murmured.

As they were making their way with some difficulty down the steep staircase, Agnes exclaimed triumphantly:

"Another conquest!"

"Ah, my Queen, you have but to wish, and the whole world would be at your feet!" was the passionate answer.

Mahmoud-el-Reis remained standing where they had left him, with the shimmering pearls in his bronzed palm. He sent his men away to fetch his horse, and turned, in the fading light, to Dilah's picture.

"That woman has looked at Dilah; her lips have spoken Dilah's name, and it sounded like sacrilege in my ears."

He moved to the window and examined the pearls.

"That woman is beautiful, and the pearls are costly. Why do I despise them so? And why do I hate her?"

He opened his hand, and the gleaming white pearls fell to the floor—and he slowly crushed them to powder with his heel.

"As she looked at Dilah, I seemed to see my dear one frown, and hear her voice say: 'Have nought to do with this woman and her gift.'"

He threw his rich mantle round his shoulders, and crossed the little room, treading under foot again as he did so the little heap of pure white dust—and such was Madame Agnes' latest "conquest."

Mahmoud-el-Reis left Notre-Dame, and, mounting his beautiful steed, rode away unattended out of the busy city.

(To be continued.)

It is a little more than three years since I received a letter from my most intimate friend and college chum George Clymer, inviting me to his nuptials, which were to take place in two weeks. Clymer was a promising young lawyer in London; I was practising medicine in Glasgow. We managed to meet at least once a year in one or the other of these places, and we corresponded vigorously meanwhile.

I said I had received a letter from Clymer. I have it before me as I write. I looked it up on his particular request that I should destroy it. But this is a digression.

I wrote my friend, in reply to his invitation, that it was impossible for me to be present on the interesting occasion (there was a serious epidemic in Glasgow at the time, and I could not afford to quit the field, even for a few days), and sending him my earnest congratulations on his approaching happiness. I felt convinced that the union between him and Miss Wandell would be a happy one, from all I had heard of the young lady, although I had never met her. She was an only child; her father was wealthy. It was known she had rejected suitors who, from a financial standpoint, would be regarded by the many more eligible than Clymer. He, on the other hand, was a "rising" young man, with a good practice, and considered by mammas as a desirable match for their daughters. Everything, therefore, seemed in accord.

Two days after the wedding was to take place I received the following note from my friend. It bore no date and no address within. These were the words:

"It is off—irretrievably off. Never allude to the subject to me, or to any human being by word, sign or correspondence, as you value our friendship. Destroy—George."

The note took my breath away. I did destroy it on the instant, but I have quoted it correctly, word for word.

When Clymer and I met again, we met as we had always met. I need not add that no allusion was made by either to what had happened. Our close intimacy continued as before, and I tried to fancy that my friend was the same fellow he had always been. But let that pass.

I have said this was something more than three years ago. It was early in June last that I received another letter from Clymer, which led to my looking up the first one I have alluded to. The letter was brief—I may say abrupt. It informed me of his marriage that very day, and contained a cordial invitation to come directly to his house on my next visit to London, which he knew was to be in the following month.

I confess I was taken a good deal aback by this announcement. I replied at once, and while declining the invitation to become his guest, I assured Clymer that he could count on me as a constant visitor. The fact is, I was curious first to understand the position of affairs which had so suddenly converted Clymer into a Benedict.

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Well, I went to see him at once on my arrival. I was introduced to his wife. I was charmed with her. I was forced to stay to dinner that very day. Everything went off delightfully. Clymer was a *connoisseur* in the choice wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy, and I never drank finer than on that occasion.

As the conversation became prolonged, Mrs. Clymer left us to ourselves to continue it. I felt there was something wanting to give additional zest to the "finish." My eye, perhaps, glanced over the table with an inquiring look.

"You are wondering at the absence of the fragrant Havana?" said my friend.

"Frankly, that is so," I replied.

"We will now," said Clymer, "talk of the past. The interdiction is removed, and I will tell you why I have not touched a cigar for all these years, nor suffered one in my house.

"When my first engagement took place, there was but one thing in which my own tastes were not agreeable to my *fiancée*. I was very fond of a cigar. She detested it. I at once yielded, and declared that I would never touch a cigar again.

"Nothing could exceed the felicity which we enjoyed. The wedding-day was fixed, as you know. It was to be celebrated at the church. Then a wedding-breakfast at the house of the bride, after which we were to start upon our honeymoon.

"It was very late before I retired on the previous night; I had so many little things to arrange in my house. In fact, it was in the early hours of the morning before I got to bed, and then I was so much excited that I could not sleep. I arose early and finished all my little arrangements. My man, Somers, served a delicious breakfast at nine. I sat at the table, thinking over everything for an hour. I went to my library. On the top of a little bookstand was the empty cigar box that had stood there for many months. I took it down to throw it in the waste-basket. What devil prompted me to raise the lid I do not know, but I did raise it. There was just one cigar left.

"I had nearly two hours, and nothing with which to occupy myself. The same demon whispered: 'It is a pity to throw away that fine cigar! Smoke it.' And I did smoke it!

"I sat in my armchair enjoying its fragrance till it was finished, and carried away by a dreamy atmosphere of reverie, I fell into a profound slumber.

"I was roused by a knocking at my door. It was my faithful Somers, who said: 'I fear you may be late, sir; it is very near twelve!' I started, looked at my watch, and, great Heavens! it lacked but five minutes to the hour. Fortunately, the church was not very far off, but I could not reach it in five minutes on foot. I seized my hat and rushed into the street, not hearing the voice of Somers, who called emphatically after me. A cab was fortunately passing. I jumped into it and was driven with furious speed to the church. I had saved my distance, and as I got out the clock was striking twelve. My best man was waiting for me at the church door.

"'Good Heavens, Clymer!' he exclaimed, 'what is the matter?'

"'Don't stop here talking,' I replied. 'I am in time.'

"I took his arm to walk with him up the aisle. Our friends had mustered in force. Everybody had turned to look at us, and, as it seemed to me, with a curious significance. My best man, in fact, quietly disengaged his arm from mine and walked a little in the rear. As we reached the altar, several persons rose to their feet, and I could hear a little faint tittering from several parts of the building. I hastened towards my bride. She turned indignantly away. Her father came up.

"'What means this mummery?' he said.

"I was dumfounded, entirely incapable of utterance My best man whispered in my ear: 'Don't you know what you have on? Look at yourself.'

"I did look, and without a word rushed madly from the church and into the carriage destined for a different purpose, and was driven to my house. I locked myself in my room. I believe I swore and raved. When the paroxysm was over I became cool. I gave Somers some special orders, and I wrote that short note to you.

"I have still to give you the explanation. Before taking my breakfast I had dressed myself elaborately, so as to be quite ready for the ceremony. When that diabolical cigar caught my eye, and I had yielded to the temptation, I took off my wedding coat and hung it in my wardrobe, putting on at the same time my smoking jacket, a variegated garment, which had been in disuse for several months. When roused by my man, and when I discovered that I should be late at my wedding, my brain was on fire. I thought of nothing but how to reach the church in time. It may appear incredible to you that I did not observe what I was wearing, but I tell you the literal truth.

"I never made any attempt at explanation or apology. I knew it would be useless. My friends did undertake it, as I afterwards learnt, but in vain. Why should I have violated a solemn promise to my *fiancée*, and that on my wedding day? Why, indeed?

"The young lady and her father went abroad, and remained absent for more than two years. I took my summer vacation across the Atlantic; then came home and settled down to hard work. This is about the whole of it.

"And yet," said Clymer, after a pause, "perhaps you can guess who the lady is that sat at the head of the table?"

K. B. R.

SOME IDEAS WANTED.

Many thousands of our readers are regular readers of Pick-Me-Up.

Many thousands are not.

To both classes—but more particularly the latter—we wish to convey the intimation that in future Pick-Me-Up will be conducted by the organisation responsible for the paper you hold in your hand.

A very striking story by Mr. George Griffith began in its pages a week or two ago.

It is called "The Great Pirate Syndicate," and none who enjoyed "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," and "The Gold Magnet," should miss it.

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We make *Short Stories* a paper that you are glad to buy. Why shouldn't we be able to make Pick-Me-Up another?

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If you have we want that idea.

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Not more than half a sheet of note-paper must be used for idea and name and address of sender—you may send more than one idea if you like.

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SEND NO MONEY.

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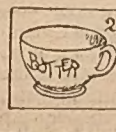
These pictures represent three well-known English Wild Flowers. The conditions of the Competition are that you find out what these flowers are, and if you are correct you undertake to purchase one of my inexpensive Solid Silver Chains. These chains are the best made, are marvellous value. Money returned if dissatisfied. Send at once, enclosing stamped and addressed envelope, so that I may inform you if correct.



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ON THE BEST AUTHORITY.

Good-for-Nothing has received an invitation to a dance. Unfortunately, he does not dance, but as he says, "He would like to go just to see the fun," but he does not know whether he ought to accept the invitation under the circumstances.———— There is no reason why you should not accept the invitation, but you certainly should at the same time inform your hostess that you are not a dancer, in order that she may make her plans accordingly.

Camera.—There are three factories in the United States which together consume a total of nearly 2,000,000 eggs a year in the manufacture of the peculiar kind of paper known to photographers as albumen paper.

John K.—Your idea on the relative value of the crust and crumb of bread does not agree with the conclusions recently arrived at by a French scientist. For persons in good health, he says that the crust is greatly superior to the crumb. A similar statement was made by a scientist nearly a quarter of a century ago. For people troubled by their digestive organs, he says further, the crust should be eaten to the exclusion of the soft portion of the loaf.

Murphy.—The average annual value of the potato crop in the United Kingdom is £12,000,000.

Liber has some old books which he intends to put up for sale by auction. This makes him curious to learn when the first book auction took place in England, and he naturally comes to me to supply the information.———— The first book auction in this country of which there is any record was in 1676. Prefixed to the catalogue is an address to the reader saying: "Though it has been unusual in England to make sale of books by auction, yet it has been practised in other countries to advantage." The seller was Dr. Searman. For general purposes this method of sale was hardly known till 1700.

Lover of Fruit writes: "We have frozen meat; why can we not have frozen fruit?"————Fruit does not take kindly to freezing; the cells of the fruit are ruptured by refrigeration to the necessary extent, and decay sets in.

F. C. H. wants to know if gold is always the same colour.————No, indeed. An experienced man can always tell from what part of the world a piece of gold comes from by its colour. The Australian gold, for instance, is distinctly redder than that from California. Again, the gold obtained from the "placers" is more yellow than that which is taken directly from the quartz.

L. T. would like to know if Paris is really a cleaner city than London, as people sometimes say.———— It depends upon the point of view from which you regard the subject. The streets of Paris are swept every morning by 2,600 male and 600 female scavengers, divided into 149 brigades, and may be said to be cleaner than the London thoroughfares. But in the matter of general sanitation London is preferable.

Lex.—Yes, it is a curious fact that Freemasons are to be met with less frequently among lawyers than in any other profession.

Unbelieving says that a friend tells him that certain people live on clay; he would like to know whether this is so or not, if I can tell him.———— Yes, I can tell you; we keep information of every kind piled up in this office. In Alabama there are many persons whose daily food is clay dug up from the banks of the small mountain streams. They enjoy good health and live to a ripe old age, but they are thin and spiritless, and always look ill. That clay contains nourishment of some sort is clear, as they live almost entirely upon it. The most marked effect of the diet is the change in the complexion of the eater; the skin becomes sallow, then turns to an unwholesome yellow, almost the colour of the clay itself.

B. A.—The largest collection of coins is that in the possession of the Vienna Public Cabinet of Antiquities. There are 125,000 pieces of money in that collection.

P. W.—Clean water is a luxury in Venice. The inhabitants have to depend upon the rains for their supply. There is no company for supplying the city. The water for drinking and domestic uses is collected in subterranean reservoirs, where it is said to be filtered. It is doled out at the public wells, which are open one hour daily for that purpose and then are carefully locked up.

Alec intends to learn to play some musical instrument, and like a shrewd Scot he desires to operate on an instrument which will give him the best chance of earning money. "Everybody affects the cornet and violin," he writes, "so there is not a great opportunity of making money out of those. Can you tell me the name of an instrument, the players on which are scarce?" In brass bands, good trombone players are much in request; comparatively few persons learn to play it. In string bands, harp players are the most scarce.

Trotter.—If you care to make a pilgrimage to Valladolid in Spain, you may find the house in which Columbus died. Small respect is paid to this relic of the past, however, its present use being as a cow stable.

N. A. L. thinks of touring in Russia shortly, and asks me to give him particulars of the small things he should provide himself with in order to avoid inconvenience.———— That is too large an order for this page, but I may tell him that in most cases the small hotel proprietors do not furnish bed-clothes. They would as soon think of giving you a second-hand tooth-brush. They would not dream of giving you sheets and similar articles that had been used, even though washed, and they would not give the things you had slept in to a second party; consequently it would not pay to supply them. They do provide a bedstead, but the traveller often wishes he had brought his own, until he gets accustomed to the Russian bed.

C. C writes to ask if horses of any particular colour are stronger than others.————Grey horses are supposed to be capable of greater strength and endurance than those of any other colour. So much so, that only grey horses are used in the Russian artillery.

M. H. and P. T. wish me to settle a discussion between them as to whether physical or mental labour is the most exhaustive to the body.———— According to medical authorities, three hours of close study wear out the body more than a whole day of physical exercise.

A Would-be Reformer writes to complain of the ambiguity caused by the use of the same word "line" both for an entire railway and also for each separate track. He suggests that it would be a great improvement if the expression "track" were adopted in England as it has always been in America.————You are mistaken, W.B.R., in supposing that the English railway vocabulary is deficient in this respect. Although the ordinary man in the street might, in his ignorance, refer to a particular track as a "railway line," a railway man would call it neither a "line" nor a "track," but a "road."

M. P. B.—The original folio edition of Shakespeare (1623) is valued at £1,200. The Baroness Burdett-Coutts owns a copy, for which she paid £1,600.

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Lot 22.—10s. 6d. White Scotch Blankets for 5s. 9d. per pair, measuring about 56in. by 76in.; light, warm, and durable. Admittedly the cheapest blankets ever offered. Special Offer: 3 pairs for 15s. 6d. Satisfaction guaranteed or money returned.

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70in. by 90in.	8lb.	11s. 6d.	33s.
75in. by 96in.	9lb.	13s. 0s.	37s.
80in. by 99in.	10lb.	15s. 3d.	43s.
86in. by 104in.	11lb.	16s. 9d.	48s.

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2	9 0 by	7 6	7/0	11 9
3	9 0 by	9 0	8/6	13/6
4	10 6 by	7 6	8/9	13/9
5	10 6 by	9 0	10/0	15/6
6	12 0 by	9 0	11/6	18/0

Lot 60. SIZES and PRICES. No.	ft. in.	ft. in.	Sale Price.	Former Price.
7	12 0 by	10 6	13/6	20/6
8	13 6 by	10 6	15/3	24/0
9	12 0 by	12 0	15/3	24/0
10	13 6 by	12 0	17/0	27/0
11	15 0 by	12 0	19/0	32/0
12	18 0 by	12 0	22/9	36/0

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